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ARNOLD ROBUR.

VOL. II.

ARNOLD ROBUR

A Novel

BY MARTIN COMBE

AND

DUNCAN LISLE

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL

LIMITED

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RICHARD CLAY AND SONS,
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ARNOLD ROBUR.

CHAPTER I.

BENEATH THE SURFACE.

“I have heard that what they call Nature is like a potter who makes earthen vessels. He who makes one handsome vessel may also make two, three, and a hundred. This I say because in God’s faith my lady the duchess comes not a whit behind my mistress, the lady Dulcinea del Toboso.”

Sancho Panza.

“DEAR MASTER,

“This cums wishing of you well,
“and beging to infirm you as all wot i spected
“as cum trew, please sir. i dont know as i re-
“members anythink of the sort befor at Oakleigh,
“and Mr. Rok he grees with me as this here
“upset is jest natral and wot wos to be spected
“after the smooth way thinks hev bin going
“lately, being fortnitly in the house at the time
“of this here desprit attemp, and behaving of
“hisself that galunt as in a party advanced, so
“to speke, in ears, and not over limber in the pins
“neither, reglar sprised me and Mrs. Marchpane,

“threw the think being strange like, not to
“say onfamilius. Not but wot firy arms is well
“enuff in day time, and i aint the wun to jump
“wen i heers them as a genral rool, but wot i
“says is they is ap to wake wun up at nite
“rayther to sudding. Well, sir, this here wisit-
“ashun of Providence, leastways pikers and
“steelers, hev cum at larst, and there aint no
“knowing wot may happen next, speshully cos
“nothink aint bin took this time, baring the
“winder as was smasht. All sorts of purwishuns
“as bin made agin a nuther attemp, not as i hev
“sed nothink to the police, wishing to ax yore
“leev, sir, fust, and bin much aboosed in conse-
“quence. Hopping as you will improov the corse
“wot hev bin took, and will rite wurd as you can
“rest up on me for follering of your instrukshuns
“immejit on a rival,

“i rites meself yours respectabel,

“J. GIBBINS.

“P.S.—There may or may not be a briter side
“to all this here. i rayther thinks there is, but
“wont make to shore.”

An autograph letter from the astute Joshua was, as Arnold knew, a unique curiosity, and it may have been that the thought consoled him for the riddling hints and allusions of this extra-

ordinary missive. At any rate he was more disposed to be amused than vexed when, after repeated perusals, he had succeeded in emending the original as far as that process was possible. For there were two important difficulties which do not appear in this conscientiously edited copy,—the eccentricity of the penmanship and the total absence of stops. Obscure as the bailiff's epistolary style appeared on first sight, one of the causes of this obscurity—the letter's unbroken continuity—was removable.

This obstacle in the way of interpretation, though bad enough, was finally surmounted ; but when it came to the danger of mistaking one word for another, to say nothing of the enigmatical look worn by whole passages—many of them being evident palimpsests,—the job would have bothered an expert. Gibbins' spelling was unorthodox to the verge of systematic heresy, the only words he got right being those he put down offhand, and without thinking them over. These were, however, quite the exception. Worse than all, when the task was at last accomplished the result of the morning's work was so eminently unsatisfactory, and the meaning of the document, supposing it to have any, still involved in such impenetrable gloom, that the reader felt like some half sceptical visitor at Delphi or Dodona in old times, and rather regretted the expenditure

of so much ingenuity. Perhaps, however, the provoking want of perspicuity in this oracular communication was not without its advantages. There was less time for suspense, on account of the period occupied in translation, and Robur had only just begun to wonder in good earnest what it was all about when the second post brought him a lucid account of the matter from Mr. Dalton, who offered to undertake the business of investigating it as far as possible. The facts seemed too insignificant, now that he was in possession of them, to make Arnold hurry back to Oakleigh ; so he contented himself with accepting his late guardian's proffered assistance, and wrote a soothing note to Gibbins to calm his agitation. When, in addition to this, Mr. Rock's share in the occurrence had received a flattering acknowledgment there was nothing more to be done. The whole affair was soon dismissed from Arnold's mind : the range of his mental activity was somewhat circumscribed just about that time, extending, indeed, no farther than the limits of Burnport and its neighbourhood. More distant objects failed to interest, and his attention refused to concentrate itself upon them,—not that there was anything very remarkable in the circumstance ; for, to tell the truth, his efforts to break through the charmed circle were not particularly vigorous.

He had become well acquainted with the ins and outs of the town, and, like all habitués, knew which part of it suited him best. On the whole, therefore, his decided preference for East Rise and the adjacent locality is little likely to have been the result of a mere idle, ill-considered crotchet, and could doubtless have been amply justified by an appeal to some occult hygienic principle. Could he have haunted so assiduously the municipal garden unless there had been a sound sanitary reason at the bottom of such conduct? Sometimes he would meet Miss Joanna and Ursula, and then they would all pace up and down the sheltered promenade together.

“So convenient, you know,” said Joanna innocently on one of these occasions, “for us to have this garden close to our house. It might almost belong to us, for we hardly ever meet a soul here except you, Mr. Robur. Delightfully quiet and private, isn’t it? I’m sure I don’t wonder at your enjoying it.”

Aunt Joan was not accompanied by her niece that day, as it happened,—having been out alone to do some marketing, she told Arnold,—so he was less embarrassed by her remark than he might have been. The insinuation which it contained was unanswerable, and he acknowledged with a laugh that, much as he liked the garden at all times, the moments when it appeared at

its best were, in his opinion, unfortunately rare. There was a pause, during which the lady shook her head once or twice, and sighed.

"Yes," she said presently, "few gardens can boast a flower like the one that grows near here; may it never know less careful tending than ours has been."

They were resting on a seat by the pond, for the air was full of sunshine, and the glen was always warmer than other places. Aunt Joan had taken off her gloves, and they had fallen from her lap to the ground. Arnold stooped to pick them up, and was struck, as he returned them, by an expression on her face which he had never noticed there before. She was gazing straight in front of her with a clear brow, her eyes slightly dilated, and a warmer tint than usual in her cheeks. Her hands were clasped loosely, and her whole figure seemed illuminated with that after-glow of youth which sometimes plays about the path of men and women whose hearts do not grow old as their joints stiffen, the best aureole that may be worn on this side of the grave. He could scarcely have believed such transfiguration to be possible in the careworn and wrinkled woman before him; indeed, while he hesitated it was gone, but not before the revelation had been made of hidden beauty behind this matter-of-fact exterior, that charm

which can invest grey hair with the rich hue of romance, shedding upon the dullest career of doing good a transcendent glory not of earth. Nature's treasury lies everywhere beneath the common stones we tread on ; but the witchery of greed which is upon us forces us away, letting us look at none but shining surfaces. So are we doomed to miss over earth's navel as a mere unsightly block, and find some day that the jabbering heroism of publicity upon which we have been intent is a paste imposture after all, when it has ruined us to secure it for our coffers.

"Miss Blunsden," said Arnold, looking her honestly in the face, "have I been taking an unfair advantage of your generosity to me?"

"Not so far as I know," she replied somewhat bluntly, "but that is surely a question which you are most competent to answer for yourself. You have been frank with me, and I will be frank with you. No, I think you have been very moderate with your attentions. You may be sure I should have spoken out if I had thought badly of you in that respect," and Joanna gave vent to a grim chuckle in which he could not help joining, the sincerity of her last observation was so unmistakable. "The fact is," she continued, folding her arms as if in the determination to go through with the performance of an unpleasant duty, "it was your very moderation

that made me drop that hint just now. You see, there was an evident self-restraint about such a piece of consideration, and it rather frightened me. Take my word for it, Mr. Robur, you are getting on too fast. Outsides aren't enough to go upon, as you know quite well in most things," and she nodded sagaciously at the young man; "you wouldn't take a house on the strength of 'em, for instance, and you can't take a wife on trial as you can a house."

"Surely appearances aren't always deceptive," said Arnold, a little oppressed by Miss Joanna's common sense; "I should have thought that nothing could be more truthful than the expression on some people's faces. I don't fancy Miranda was wrong in her first impression of Ferdinand, and I often feel inclined to say with her, 'There's nothing ill can dwell in *such* a temple.'"

There was a pause, during which his companion took a biscuit from her reticule, and proceeded to feed the ducks with it. When she had thrown away the last morsel, she remarked, carefully removing a crumb from her dress, "Well, I'm not particularly good at special pleading, and I don't suppose Miranda's associations could have been much more stainless than Ursula's have been. If there is any deception in the case it isn't on her side, Mr. Robur. Only it

seems to me better to wait and judge folks by their fruit."

"You wish me to wait, Miss Blunsden? I am prepared to do that; why, if that is all——" He stopped suddenly in the midst of his heat. Again that change in her which he had already witnessed, only this time her calmness seemed almost stern. What could it mean? Her voice did not sound hard, however, as she replied deliberately—

"No, you are not prepared to face failure and disappointment. You can wait, if waiting means success; not otherwise. Could you face the growing conviction that your love was to be idle as far as attainment of its object was concerned? Could you endure to feel that, worthy, and more than worthy, as the object was, your attachment could never be returned as you had resolved it should and must? No, no; you must not give yourself credit for such unselfishness, Mr. Robur. Pardon me for being old, and knowing better," she added gently.

Arnold was humbled. It was true enough, he thought, this noble constancy without hope was beyond him. Others might so endure, but not he; even this woman was immeasurably superior to him, for he was convinced that she had spoken from her own experience. Here, then, was the key to her sweet and quiet character. It was

easy to see now why Joanna had remained single all her life,—certainly not for want of the capacity for loving and being loved, or because her soul had never been tried by the flame of lifelong devotion beside which all other fires sink pale and ineffectual. Might not her example, he mused, point out the answer to the riddle which he was fitfully trying to solve? What if the only road to happiness lay through this very capacity for sacrifice? With such a talisman, however uncertain the future, his life was founded upon a rock; ultimate fruition or loss were become secondary matters, and every grievance temporary. Shall love prompt a man to die for its object, and shall it not also bid him live—a harder trial sometimes—when his hope is gone? No unmeaning flourish would be the death-bed *Vixi* of one who had carried so glorious a failure about with him all his days.

“The murder’s out,” said Aunt Joan, putting on her gloves, “and I’m not going to say any more about it. If you’re not going to give me up for being so outspoken, come and see us as often as you like. It won’t do you any harm, in my opinion, to be our guest more frequently. One doesn’t get rid of an infatuation any the sooner for brooding over it alone. Anyhow, we all like each other; and I don’t see why we shouldn’t improve the acquaintance as much

as possible. Bless my soul, it's beginning to rain."

Arnold was weather-wise, and had brought his umbrella with him; so there was an excellent excuse for walking on with Miss Joanna. They parted on the door-step of the house on East Rise, the lady remarking, as she thanked him for the shelter, that he was not to be taken in by a bright morning, at any rate. "I never dreamt the clouds could come up so soon after the sunshine," she added.

"'The Devil is beating his mother,'" said Arnold; "you forget what a skilful navigator I am; when are you going to trust yourself out for a sail with me?" and he set off down the hill at a brisk pace.

He was eating an apple that evening at dessert when he suddenly remembered Joanna's advice to judge people by their fruit. "Which do you like best, apples or pears?" he asked the old lady whose neighbour he generally found himself at table d'hôte.

"Well, really, now you ask me," she replied conscientiously, "I don't know that I've any preference. Don't you think one sort of fruit is as good as another?"

"Yes, I suppose it is; and yet I like apples a great deal better than pears."

"It all depends what one has been accustomed

to," said the old lady ; " now I can remember an old pear-tree in our garden at home when I was a girl, and that makes me think of all the people, two or three generations, to whom I have known it give enjoyment." She sipped her wine reflectively, and then continued—" I don't suppose a taste that requires to be cultivated is ever quite the same thing. It's second nature with me to enjoy the flavour of pears and apples, but I must confess I never cared much for olives."

" But surely one may acquire new tastes which grow in time to be as strong as the old ones," said Arnold, " or how could one make friends outside one's own family ? "

The old lady laughed. " What a corner you've driven me into ! " she said. " After all, it depends a good deal on your bringing up what sort of people you take to afterwards. Even if you strike out quite a different line from what your family intended you to, that's only natural if they've forced you along with them against your will, and of course one's education goes on more or less outside one's family," and the lilac ribbons nodded at him benignly.

Subject as young men are to the sway of youthful beauty, they must often be conscious of reaction when their sovereign oversteps prerogative, and admit to themselves that " persons in years seem many times more amiable." Love's

service becomes occasionally too exacting, and they betake them to those wise counsellors who have passed through it all before them, and been honourably discharged. Perhaps there are few women whose retirement has always been so complete that they can attribute their solitary performance of life's duties to the accident of a narrow circle of male acquaintances, or who can look back and say their wedded happiness was ensured by such and such a party or dance. But whatever the truth may be, such was not the case with Hilda and Joanna Blunsden. The elder of the two sisters, though not without a certain prettiness of her own in younger days, of which the traces were still visible, had never inspired more than a passing interest, — an interest doomed to be dissipated by further intercourse with its object. Had Arnold been unlucky enough to have imparted his confidence to her, instead of to her sister, he would certainly have met with scant sympathy, for no place in her memory was green with the lasting freshness of any similar experience. In spite of her romantic talk, she could be as hard and selfishly practical as the pettiest of petty tradesmen, — a class she affected to despise, — even to the extent of allowing Joanna to bear the whole expense of maintaining Ursula, whom a chance had thrown upon their hands, assured that her staunch junior

would never let the girl suppose she was not equally indebted to both her aunts. The difference between the two women, as far as it was outward, may be summed up by saying that a lifetime spent in Joanna's society would have been too short for the full enjoyment of it, her kind acts and forbearances were so inexhaustible; while a single day of her sister's company would have tried the patience of the most stoical person who ever lived.

Now, though the curate of St. Guthlac's, the most fashionable church at Burnport, was a great ally of Miss Blunsden's,—being, in fact, the chaplain of her Guild, as she chose to call him,—a great gulf was fixed between her and the vicar, into which she was in the habit of emptying all the vials and slop-pails of her wrath.

The three ladies were sitting in the drawing-room after dinner, Aunt Hilda going to sleep over her embroidery, while Ursula read aloud to Aunt Joan from *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*. Joanna left off her work to watch the reader's cheek kindling at the account of some hero's exploits, and when Ursula laid down the book at the end of the passage, they both fell to eagerly canvassing the respective merits of the opposite causes concerned. This roused the Mother Superior, who had no fancy for the policy of non-intervention in any subject foreign

or domestic. She soon found, however, that the present discussion was beyond, or, according to her opinion, beneath her, and autocratically determined to change it.

“What was it that horrid man, Mr. Montague, said in his sermon last Sunday, Ursula?” she asked.

Ursula laughed; she knew what Miss Hilda referred to, as they had already more than once been favoured with that lady’s unflattering criticism on poor Mr. Montague’s remark.

“Do you mean what he said about his being a ‘red-hot Radical,’ Aunt Hilda?”

“Yes, child, of course I do. To think, Joanna, dearest, of that man daring to get up in the pulpit, and air his dreadful political views before a respectable congregation! As if he were talking to a crowd of cobblers and shopkeepers out on the beach, too, instead of to ladies and gentlemen in church.”

Aunt Joan could not repress a yawn.

“One would think, Hilda, that you wanted him to call us ‘Ladies and Gentlemen,’ like a member of Parliament speaking to his constituents, instead of his ‘dear brethren.’”

Miss Blunsden knew what was due to herself, and she resolved not to let this remark pass without a scathing rebuke. “It’s bad enough to yawn, my dear,” she said severely, “but now

you are positively profane. I'm ashamed of you."

"Much obliged to you, my dear; but I really don't think Mr. Montague has committed a crime,—even though I can't agree with his politics. He won't extend his influence with his parishioners that way, I think, as most of them are Conservatives; but that's all."

"That's all!" cried her sister, aghast at this flippancy, "do you mean to say that we may take our private differences and party badges to church with us without doing any harm, and air our own opinions before our fellow-creatures without caring where we are, or what they think of us? Really, Joanna, dearest, I sometimes think you can't believe in anything."

Miss Hilda had a way—and a very common way it is, unfortunately, with disputants of every class—of putting arguments of her own invention into an opponent's mouth for the purpose of exposing their weak points with ruthless impartiality. She was buckling on her armour for an edifying sham-fight of this description, when Ursula, who could not bear to sit still and see her best friend so unkindly mauled, interposed, and hazarded the observation that Aunt Joan had neither said, nor meant to say, anything of the sort, she was sure. Unwise as it is in general to anticipate a friend's controversial powers, unless you want to

lose your friend, it was more so than ever in this particular case. An outbreak with Joanna always did Miss Hilda a world of good. Her goody-goody prudishness left her no opportunity of exhibiting those honest emotions which even the silliest people sometimes feel; and, as a consequence, ebullitions innocent enough, if allowed free vent, were seasoned, the longer they were delayed, with a more pungent dash of spite.

There was an awkward silence for a minute or two. Miss Hilda seemed to be struggling with suppressed excitement; Ursula could hear the tissue-paper rustling under her hand, and knew it trembled.

"Side with your aunt, child," she said at length bitterly, mastering herself; "I am accustomed to have you both against me, heaven knows."

"Nonsense, Hilda." Aunt Joan's voice was stern, to be sure, and yet it sounded oddly tremulous too. "Ursula loves you as much as she does me,—don't you, Ursula? and you shouldn't talk like that. If I don't believe quite everything you do, at all events I believe that we ought all to be united. It wont do for three unprotected females to go scratching each other's eyes out when they might live in peace and quietness," and she forced a laugh.

Ursula went over to where Miss Hilda was sitting, and kissed her.

“Forgive me if I said anything wrong,” she whispered; “and pray, dear Aunt Hilda, don’t think any more about my thoughtlessness. Why,” she went on, looking at the embroidery on the frame, “you want me to help you, I can see; shall we try to finish off”—she was going to say “his dear old nose,” but refrained in time—“the upper part of St. Guthlaë’s face, down to the mouth, before we go to bed?”

This was an adroit manœuvre, and Miss Hilda capitulated without more ado.

“Well, well, my dear,” she said, heaving a piteous sigh, “we will say no more about it; I dare say we shall have plenty more opportunities.”

To people not in the habit of looking below the surface, Miss Blunsden’s little display of temper may seem rather absurd; but ladies do not always say exactly what they mean, and it is possible that her strictures upon Mr. Montague were not entirely due to the ostensible cause. But whether or not she had simply made use of the introduction of politics in the pulpit as a peg on which to hang her discourse, and nothing more, certain it is that on the very Sunday in question she had, from the moment her enemy gave out his text, become afflicted with so violent

an attack of catarrh that he was driven, after the complete annihilation of some of his best periods, to break off in the middle of his sermon and suggest the advisability of retiring to all who found it impossible to control their coughs. Aunt Hilda, in her capacity as Mother Superior, always occupied a front seat directly under the preacher's eyes, and though her tortured victim's proposal was veiled under the most discreet generality, she knew—so she said afterwards in a weak moment—upon whose malady the wretched Montague had chosen to make his unchristian and ungentlemanly attack. Was she to be insulted openly, she asked, because she happened to be suffering from a bad cold? No; *she* would not suffer the sacred edifice to be disgraced, whatever others might do. So she had stuck to her post, with the result of winning the day, and earning the gratitude of the congregation by bringing the clergyman's discourse to a premature close. She might have been less proud of her achievement, however, if she had heard him commenting on the affair to his wife over the luncheon table.

“That Jezebel spoilt the sermon over which I took such pains with one of her spurious coughing fits,” he said. “Never mind; I shall preach it again next Sunday; it'll save me the trouble of writing another.”

No one can say that, after his atrocious conduct to her, Miss Hilda had not sufficient reason for detracting from the vicar's character whenever and in whatever mode she liked. But after all—and here again there is the testimony of her own word to be relied on—she was a charitable woman, and in spite of this and similar affronts she did not relax her pious efforts on behalf of her parish and for the honour of her patron saint. A large room at the top of the house was given up to the service of the Guild. Its members often met there, and Miss Joanna was always warned to be in readiness to make tea for them on such occasions, and send it up from below. Besides this the larger pieces of work were done there, the frames requiring more space than could be allotted to them down-stairs. Miss Hilda possessed rare administrative ability, and not only stitched away herself,—at which occupation, if the truth must be confessed, she was rather an indifferent hand,—but enlisted every capable recruit she could lay hold of into the service likewise. Two or three days in each week Ursula was made to take her turn at this drudgery, and her nimble fingers worked at it uncomplainingly, though she could bring herself to feel no enthusiasm for the cause to which her aunt was devoted, and would far rather have been painting in her own little studio, or singing at the

piano. Joanna and she were both fond of music, while Miss Hilda hated it, with the exception of Gregorian chants (when she was told what they were), and always declared it to be waste of time, besides making her head ache ; so they could only play their duets together when she was out of hearing.

One particular chair in the drawing-room—needless to say it was decidedly the most comfortable one—was appropriated to the Mother Superior's exclusive use. It was permanently stationed in the cosiest corner by the fire-place, and when she was not there a cord was drawn across its two arms to protect it from the unconsecrated pressure of persons of the baser sort. In order to further ensure this shrine against profanation in her absence, it was Miss Hilda's custom to place her own peculiar footstool on the seat,—both the stool and the seat being embroidered with the same quasi-ecclesiastical pattern, so that the Apostle Paul himself could not have found any disorderliness to grumble at in the proceeding. The little table containing the lady's silks, and the work for which they were intended, was similarly draped, and gave evidence of the same austere luxury. Now it is a melancholy fact that the only other human being who had ever ventured to usurp Aunt Hilda's chair was Mr. Montague. When she

entered the room to receive his very first call he was "discovered," as the stage-direction says, seated on the virgin cushion from which he had actually removed the stool. Hence the implacable animosity of its owner,—a feeling which, happily for her peace of mind, was not reciprocated with equal warmth. The vicar was amused at her punctiliousness, said that his digestion would suffer without paying Miss Blunsden an occasional visit, and allowed her considerable liberty as his self-appointed sacristan.

The only person from whom Miss Hilda ever met with any real resistance was Joanna; and, though the wounds she thus received in sisterly combat were few and far between, the sense of injury from their infliction was by no means soon effaced. Joanna was very patient, like all strong characters, and before Ursula came to live with them she had borne so much from her sister—having only herself to think of—that she cannot be altogether acquitted of having spoiled that estimable woman. Aunt Joan could see her own rights encroached upon without a murmur; but when someone else's interest was at stake, especially where the comfort and happiness of "that dear friendless child," as she called Ursula, was concerned, she was so uncompromising a champion that Miss Hilda might as well have tried to persuade a stone wall with iron

spikes on the top. When the girl's mother died, and she was left penniless, Joanna had insisted upon giving her all the advantages of their school, and bringing her up as a lady. It was the first important difference that had occurred between the sisters for years, and after a sharp encounter Hilda went down before her opponent's determined front. If Joanna had cared to fight the condition attached to her senior's consent, doubtless she might have scored another victory ; but she had earned a solid little annuity for herself, and contemptuously yielded her agreement to undertake the sole responsibility of providing for her *protégée*. From that day forward Ursula was at the bottom of all their disputes, and though the younger sister always carried her point, it was generally attended by some small personal sacrifice, her careless generosity often giving Hilda an advantage, which she was not slow to use. Not that the elder Miss Blunsden ever had reason to regret the addition to her domestic circle. Ursula soon became, even to her, a silently recognised necessity. The house on East Rise would have been a cheerless home without her buoyant spirits, and her aunts could scarcely have retired from their active duties without forebodings of regret and *ennui* if they had been deprived of the promise held out to them of her sweet companionship. During their

life at Burnport she had been Aunt Hilda's willing slave, and it is doubtful whether she would have got any time to herself at all, had it not been for Joanna's constant interference. The latter always kept her remonstrances for Miss Hilda's private ear, for she had a great notion of the fitness of things, and would never have condescended to tout for an allegiance distinct from that which Ursula, who had been brought up in the same wholesome doctrine, paid equally to both the sisters. The girl had no idea what was the real *casus belli* underlying the domestic scenes which she sometimes witnessed, and which appeared to arise upon ridiculously trivial grounds.

The last stitch had been put in the saint's nose, and Ursula rose to go to bed.

Joanna had been sniffing impatiently for the last quarter of an hour, and boiled over as soon as she was left alone with her blinking senior.

"How fagged the poor dear looks," she said indignantly; "it's a shame, Hilda, to try her eyes with that tiresome patchwork when she has been working at those cloths and things all the morning in that cold room up-stairs,"—and she poked the fire viciously.

Miss Hilda threw off her drowsiness at the first signal of this unprovoked aggression. "This from you, Joanna, dearest!" she said in a peevish

tone ; “as if she could be better employed than in working for the parish ! Reading a book in that selfish way, so that I can’t hear a word, does her eyes every bit as much harm ; and yet when I’m not feeling very well, and don’t get on with our Saint’s head as fast as I could wish, you won’t let her help me without talking as if it was *I* that was selfish and unkind.”

“Really, Hilda, you’re enough to make St. Guthlac turn in his grave ;” Aunt Joan was standing by the mantel-piece unconsciously brandishing the poker which she had not yet laid down. “I don’t see what the parish has to do with it ; the parish doesn’t want Ursula to turn plain and old before her time. And as to your being out of sorts, isn’t that bad enough without her being laid up as well ? Take some castor oil, my dear, and you’ll soon be better. You ought not to take advantage of the child’s good heart in the way you do, Hilda ; there’s nothing to justify your shutting her up in that stuffy room on a splendid morning. Don’t tell me St. Guthlac ever wanted to stunt young people’s growth ; he wasn’t such a vampire.”

During the opening of this battery Miss Hilda had been making her way in a stately progress across the room. When her sister stopped she turned round with her hand on the door-handle,

and covered her retreat as only a veteran strategist can :—

“If you speak like that, my dear, I must leave the room.” No exit could have been more dignified and self-contained ; no other plan can be half so successful in convincing an adversary how hopelessly in the wrong he is.

Joanna looked at her watch, and smiled when she saw that it was already five minutes past Miss Hilda’s normal bed-time. Then she became aware of the poker, and placed it in the fender. That done she walked up and down for a little while, leaving off at last to wipe her glasses, which were moist.

“It’s very hard to do one’s duty by some people,” she muttered, blowing out the candles, and preparing to follow Miss Hilda.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE SURFACE.

“We endeavour to get reputation by such faults as we determine not to amend.”—*La Rochefoucault*.

EVERYONE knows what a difference there is between foreigners in the way they adapt themselves to their strange surroundings. Some will get accustomed to new manners, idioms, ideas, with marvellous facility, and perhaps be talking slang with the natives by the time that others—starting under no greater disadvantage—are just beginning to master the merest rudiments of the language. It is related of a wandering Teuton who once made an excursion to these shores for a few weeks, that he carried back to the Fatherland a singularly low opinion of the stage reached by contemporary culinary art in England. “I liked the English people well enough,” said he to the compatriots by whom he was ‘interviewed,’ “but the English meat, ah, no, I like it not.” This roused considerable curiosity, and he was

questioned minutely as to the grounds of his objection to English meat; "was it coarse, or tough?" "was it badly cooked?" and so forth. "Ah, my good friends," he said at last, "you do not understand. I got beef and mutton; and the meat is cooked; that is all right. But I always had to eat it cold; and then, too, it was inconvenient for me to wait, see you, at the window of my lodging till I saw the purveyor pass before I could have my dinner; for they sell it you in the open street, off little sticks. Ah, heaven! and it is not always fresh!"

Frank Dalton bade fair to become a social alien of this latter class. Hitherto he had shown no capacity for adapting himself to the sphere in which his lot was cast, and he was as foreign to the old environment of his childhood as the poor German was to his novel and temporary one. Hans had his national life to fall back upon; in that, at any rate, he was thoroughly at home; but Frank was one of those unfortunate individuals for whom Nature has no room at any of her headquarters, and it seemed as though he were fated to shuffle aimlessly through his part in the great tragi-comedy, discontentedly munching his daily allowance of cats'-meat till soul and body should dissolve partnership.

Twice a week he went over to Copesbury to 'coach' with Armitage. The clergyman had a

certain amount of leisure during his residence there, a luxury which he seldom or never tasted in his own parish ; and though most of it was swallowed up by work which he had voluntarily undertaken in the poor quarter of the town, he generously devoted the remainder to the herculean task of inducing Frank to think. That young gentleman had definitely given up all intention of passing into Sandhurst. He now contemplated matriculation at Oxford, — not, indeed, with a view to any ulterior object, for he was incapable of seeing more than the immediate obstacle in his path ; that was his way of looking at it. He did not even trouble himself about the impediments which intervene between that ordeal and the degree-day. Armitage once tried to explain to him the curriculum through which he would have to pass, but Frank gazed at him absently, and paid no attention ; he never did. It is extraordinary how plausible, — nay, how meritorious,—a sentiment may sound when it is in reality only held in order to cover a deficiency in the holder.

“One thing at a time is my notion,” Frank would say to his sister ; “what’s he want to be hurrying me on to something else for, I wonder ; why, I don’t know anything about this beastly entrance exam. yet,” which last remark was, of course, undeniable ; only one is scarcely justified

in supposing that circumstances will always wait in orderly single file, as young Dalton seemed to expect, and never break out of line, no matter how long they are kept dangling for their turn. On the contrary, we are often convinced in rather an uncomfortable manner how limited their docility really is.

Grace was not without a glimmering of this : "Hadn't you better look forward, and see what you've got to do?" she said one day.

"Look forward! How you talk, Grace! *Don't* I look forward? Ain't I always looking forward to this confounded matric., just as I used to worry about the prelim. for Sandhurst? What good would have come of my thinking about passing out of Sandhurst before I'd got in, I should like to know?"

"Oh, I don't suppose anything would have come of it," she replied; "nothing came even of your thinking only of the 'prelim.', you know." Frank snorted, and nearly knocked a vase off the table.

"You're beastly unfair," he growled. "I only went in for the army to please you all, and if I couldn't pass, it isn't *my* fault, is it?"

His belief in his own blamelessness was evidently so sincere that she had not the heart to disabuse him of it, though she was at a loss to know who else could be responsible.

“Well,” she said, evading his question, “suppose you go to Oxford, as you want to do, what do you suppose that will lead to? Or is it just to pass the time pleasantly?”

“Really, Grace, you’re enough to drive a fellow mad with your eternal nagging. Why, of course it’ll lead to something,” he went on petulantly; “I can turn lawyer, doctor, parson,——anything, can’t I? I’m not going to settle what I’m going to be all in a hurry, you know, in spite of you and the parson. Can’t I look about me a bit first without your flying out at me with your stupid, inquisitive questions? If the worst comes to the worst, the gov’nor can get me into some business or other, trust him.”

Grace said nothing more, but only bent her head over her crewels, in what Frank considerably inferred to be a fit of the sulks. He got up from his chair, lounged to the window, and stood there, looking vacantly out at nothing. After a little while he began to whistle, the sound becoming shriller and more disturbing as he proceeded. Pausing suddenly in the middle of a melody more popular than refined, he drew one of his hands from its pocket, and leisurely examined his watch,—a favourite habit with lazy people. Then it suddenly occurred to him that some kittens were to be drowned that morning; so he loafed off to the stables in the

hope that he might not be too late for this diversion.

The next day Frank started soon after breakfast on one of his visits to Copesbury. He went straight to the Close, and then followed a couple of hours' drudgery—for Armitage.

His pupil had no idea of application, and his eyes were off the book the moment the clergyman turned away. Frank required the unremitting attention of three or four masters; it was impossible to make anything of him single-handed. Luncheon always found them with tempers somewhat chafed and irritable, but no farther advanced in respect of the work to be done than when they began. They were both glad when the meal was over, and they were released from the unmitigated boredom of each other's society.

"It's no good," mused Armitage, after every repetition of this farce, "the fellow will never do any more in school than out, and I must give him up, the incorrigible young muff."

However, when it came to the point, the letter to Mr. Dalton which he had so often projected, always remained unwritten, and he had persevered with his forlorn hope till Frank's last visit had been paid, and another scheme for his improvement ended in inevitable failure. It was the third week in December, and Armitage

had made arrangements to be back at Burfield by Christmas Day. Arnold was to be at Oakleigh then, and there was to be a large party at his house that evening, at which the clergyman had promised to be present. He was anxious not to injure Frank's interests with his father, and resolved to talk the matter over with Robur, as a friend of the family, before communicating his own despondency to them. "I won't spoil their Christmas, at any rate, if I can help it," he thought.

Meanwhile, the subject of these meditations was making the best of his way to the Copehouse, where it was his custom to spend the afternoon before returning home. He was seldom asked to account for the way in which he had passed the day, and as Mr. Dalton's duties on the Board of a Company carried him off to London every Wednesday to the following Friday, Frank had fixed those days for his visits to Armitage, and was free to stay at Copesbury till the last train, if he was so disposed, on a Wednesday.

Under Mr. Rock's fostering care the acquaintanceship, which had been so opportunely inaugurated, had now developed into a warmer intimacy, as was proved by the endearing epithets which lent their soft charm to this beautiful union between the inexperience of

youth and the sober maturity of age. There is no influence to be compared to that of the preceptors whom we elect to follow for ourselves. Frank's nominal tutor did not know what he was fighting against when he undertook the boy's education, and the veteran of the book-shop, heavily handicapped as he was at the start, was soon beating his clerical opponent all round the course. Hiram for his part found no lack of pliability to complain of in his young friend; far from it. "The way you set about it is the secret of educational success, sir," he was saying to a certain colleague of his, when he spied young Dalton's advancing figure under the gate which led into the Close.

"I'll go up-stairs," said this person, who was no other than Edwards, "and then we can have him all to ourselves."

Frank darted into the shop with a clatter; in that atmosphere he was a different being from his ordinary listless self.

"Hulloa! father Hiram, ain't I glad to see your old mug after the sickening stick-jaw I've been swallowing all this cursed morning."

Mr. Rock nodded and smiled in his most affable manner.

"What a young gent it is!" said he, apostrophising the surrounding books, which rudely kept their backs turned on him; "storms in

here, reeling off sarcasms to his humble friend like a lord. Ah, my dear Mr. Dalton, I've got a treat in store for you to-day," and he rubbed his hands as Frank seated himself on the counter, and drummed his heels against it.

"What sort of treat, Hiram?" he demanded; "you don't mean to say you've got *Duke Devil-buttons* for me at last, or *the Confessions of a Duenna*? Now then, let's hear all about it."

The bookseller, however, feigning to be engrossed with the ledger in front of him, his visitor was constrained to reach over, and tap him on the shoulder with his cane.

"Eh, what?" said Mr. Rock, starting; "Oh, ah, yes, such a treat, dear boy,—that is, sir. It's not Devil-buttons either, or the Duenna; better than that," and he returned to the ledger.

Frank was fuming with impatient curiosity when the sound of a martial blast proceeding from the upper regions made him jump off the counter, and go to the foot of the stairs. Mr. Rock disclosed the roof of his mouth, as was his pleasant habit when amused, and rose from his chair.

"Found out at last," he cried, moving towards his young friend; "you're warm, sir, you're grilling, by Jingo. Don't give it up; you ought to guess my little riddle now. Who d'ye think's up-stairs, eh?"

“Not Captain Mack?” said Frank in an excited whisper.

“Captain Mack it is,” returned the other triumphantly; “come up and see him,” and he led the way to the presence of that distinguished and gallant officer.

The Captain was seated by the fire with his back to the light, in Mr. Rock’s comfortable but not over-clean reception-room. He was smoking a long churchwarden, and extended his hand with a well-bred air to the youngster. Frank took it, blushing awkwardly. He was not of an observing nature, but on this occasion he was unusually interested, and he could not help noticing the stranger’s wiry and athletic build. The man’s face did not make so clear an impression on him. There was, indeed, nothing very remarkable about it except a strange expression of vigilance which it occasionally wore, and changes of this sort were too subtle for the young gentleman’s perception. Besides, the light which came through the dingy window behind the Captain’s chair was not strong enough to make any object in the room very distinct. What there was fell on Frank as he took his seat on the opposite side of the fireplace.

“If you hadn’t blown your nose in that terrific way, my warrior,” said their host, his

voice coming muffled from the interior of a cupboard, where he was searching for something, "Mr. Dalton would never have guessed who I'd got stowed away up here, and I should have had the pleasure of breaking it to him gradually."

"Proud, I'm sure," said the person thus addressed, "that any trifling ailment of mine should have hastened the acquaintance for me of a young gentleman of spirit about whom you have told me so much. It's an ill nose, sir, that blows nobody any good."

"Well, you're both known to each other by reputation," remarked Mr. Rock, when they had all laughed at this pleasantry; "you're just the identical pair to get on together, and I take considerable credit to myself for arranging this meeting round my poor but honest fender."

The excellent bookseller did not deviate from the strictest veracity when he said these words. His absent colleague had been the theme of assiduous eulogies on his part as often as his young friend paid him a visit, till the young friend's curiosity regarding the hero of these romances had been worked up to the pitch of frenzy, and he had clamoured eagerly for a chance of meeting the redoubtable Mack. Then Mr. Rock had grown dubious whether this could be managed, had spoken of the vortex of fashionable dissipation in which the Captain was

constantly plunged, darkly hinting at his various intrigues, especially some particular complications arising out of a liaison with a certain lady of title, and had insinuated his despair of effecting the object of his young friend's ambition unless events should take an unexpected turn.

"And this, of course, we cannot rely on," he had proceeded. "Supposing, however, that the affairs I have mentioned turn out unfavourably, and compel my friend to leave London for a while, I have reason to believe that he may seek refuge from his enemies with me down here,—an unsuspecting sort of hiding-place for so distinguished a person; and then you can have your wish, Mr. Dalton, as long as you promise to keep your own counsel about the matter. You may be sure I shall be glad to see the Captain again, as I've not clapped eyes on him for years, though we keep up corresponding pretty regularly. Ah, times have changed since I first came across him in New York society, before I had my come-down in the world."

Frank never pressed his venerable instructor on the delicate subject of his reverses, and was quite satisfied with such explanation of his former career as this and similar vague allusions afforded.

"This breaks the last half-dozen of the port left me by the old Marquis of Sidon," observed

Mr. Rock, hastily scratching a label off the cobwebbed bottle which he had just uncorked, and slipping it into his pocket. "Dear me, dear me; the line's extinct now. When shall we look upon its like again?"

This question remained unanswered, it being a little doubtful to what the worthy Hiram referred. If it was the ancestry of the deceased nobleman that was in his mind, the subject could have possessed no greater interest for his hearers than if he had made the same reflection concerning the genealogical tree of Aeneas of Troy. If, on the other hand, he was thinking of the wine, the landlord of "the Cope and Mitre" could probably have furnished him with the precise terms on which a definite answer to his inquiry was possible. Captain Mack preserving a discreet silence, and Frank not as yet numbering a taste for port among his accomplishments, Hiram was forced to forego the satisfaction of a reply. After filling their glasses as well as his own, he lit his pipe,—an operation which Frank had performed for himself—and called upon the Captain to declare whether there were not some name or sentiment more privileged than another to claim the honour of their first toast. "For," he added, looking at Frank as he spoke, "we are all friends here."

"Sir," replied his elder guest, removing the pipe-stem from between his lips, "I accept your

generous sympathy, and am willing to repose confidence where it is so highly deserved."

"Woe be to the man or woman who betrays *you*," put in Mr. Rock parenthetically.

"I will not say you are wrong, sir," returned the other; "I do not wish to boast, but I will not undertake the responsibility of alleging that there is no foundation for what you say. Blood and bones!" he exclaimed, "I know of no more fitting toast on this happy occasion than 'death to the deceiver,'" and he drained his glass, and held it out.

They all drank this cheerful sentiment enthusiastically, and when the glasses were set down again Hiram's was the only one which had anything left in it. Frank was beginning to feel the noble emulation which the society of choice spirits often stimulates, and longed to distinguish himself before Mack. The life led by such a man must be worth living; how different he was from the strait-laced tyrants with whom he was compelled to pass an embittered existence,—people of his father's stamp like Armitage and Robur. The mere thought of Arnold aggravated his rebellious mood. His father's ward had always been held up as example to his father's son, and this was a grievance which Frank had sworn never to forget or forgive. Though he had seen scarcely anything of Robur for the last two years, he still

nursed his old animosity, and would have regarded it as a point of honour to injure the man who had unintentionally offended him, if an opportunity of doing so was to occur. It never entered his head to reflect that his unconscious foe was not to be blamed for the circumstances which had brought them so much together at Beau Séjour. If the elder Dalton had injudiciously crammed his ward's virtues down his son's throat, any one with a sense of justice—to say nothing of generosity—would not have considered that to be Arnold's fault, though it might be his misfortune. But Frank was neither just nor generous. His dislike remained, as such violent prejudices will, and it had lately been intensified by two circumstances. One was the simple fact that Arnold had returned from abroad, and been received with open arms as the squire of Oakleigh. Here was reasonable cause for jealousy, so Frank's evil genius told him. Was modest merit to go tamely to the wall at the swaggering behest of any fellow, just because he happened to have been born to the possession of his acres, like a few rustic ancestors before him, instead of paying down for his property in honest cash of the realm? Why should the miserly, psalm-singing young squire rank before Mr. Dalton junior, for instance, the son of a gentleman who had earned his wealth fairly in business,—more, perhaps, than could be

said of the original Robur, if the truth were only known—and could now in his retirement afford to lay out twice as much on his house and grounds as the impecunious fledgeling at Oakleigh, for all his airs? It was a monstrous piece of iniquity.

But there was another reason for his perverse hatred of Arnold,—in every sense of the word a better, though an equally groundless one. Frank had a suspicion that Grace was fond of Arnold, and fancied that he had encouraged her affection without really caring for her. Put into plain language that was his opinion. But though he could not have endured Arnold as a brother-in-law, and was determined to construe whatever the other did as a personal affront if possible, there was yet a grain of brotherly love in this hallucination, unreasonable as it was, which must be allowed to be a conspicuous set-off in a character so poor in redeeming elements as Frank's.

Mr. Rock invited his guests to let the bottle circulate freely, pointing to a couple more which were standing in a corner.

“My boy will mind the shop till closing time,” said he; “you see, I like to make a business of my pleasure. Things haven't been going smoothly, Mack, my boy, eh?”

“Damn it, no, sir,” responded the captain. “The duch—, Eulalie, I mean, has gone off and left me in the lurch, and I haven't even had the

pleasure of putting my sword through the body of the infernal scoundrel who's gone with her."

"Can't you hunt them out?" inquired Hiram.

"What would be the use? Her friends would soon find out if I was after her, and let her know. Besides, the dog would refuse my challenge if I were to horsewhip him for it in the street. It's no use, my friend, fortune has no more respect for warriors than for cowards," and Mack sucked away at his pipe with a despondent groan.

"An Alexander!" cried Mr. Rock, "sighing because he can't find anything more to conquer."

"Oh, I don't despair," said the other. "Some day I shall find my man, and stick him. I'm not going to let an old score like that stand over for nothing; and the longer he leaves it the harder it will be for him to pay the interest."

"A noble resolve, my champion; we'll open another bottle on the strength of it," was Hiram's genial comment. "Ah, Mr. Dalton," he continued, waving his corkscrew dangerously near that promising individual's open countenance, "it's an awful thing to fall foul of one of these military swells. Why, I shouldn't wonder if the captain hadn't killed as many men on his own account since he left the service as he did all the time he was fighting for his country."

Frank hereupon mustered up courage to ask if

that experienced fire-eater would favour them with a few details about his numerous duels.

Captain Mack waved his hand in deprecation of this flattery.

“Very good of you to press me, gentlemen,” he said, for Hiram was adding his entreaties to those of his young friend, “but you would only be disappointed. Every officer in the service has a checkered career to tell of by the time he has worn his uniform a score of years, and mine has nothing peculiar about it ; oh dear no.”

He listened indulgently while his companions renewed their efforts to overcome his modest reserve. After some further coy resistance on his part, and many earnest adjurations on theirs, he yielded with knightly simplicity, begging them not to throw the blame upon him if the result did not equal their expectations.

“I will describe an incident in the early part of my intrigue for the hand of the lady whom I have already mentioned,” he began, refilling his pipe ; “the few adventures which have befallen me have always sprung from some affair of the heart, and I have no doubt it will be so till that useful piece of mechanism ceases to beat. It is now two years ago that I first met Eulalie,—*my* Eulalie I used to call her then—at Barcelona. I was living there at the time, having sold out of the army several years previously. We had

often met on the promenade that runs through the fashionable quarter,—the gay, the exquisite *Rambla* ; shall I ever forget it ! and knew each other well by sight, therefore, when a common friend took me to her *loge* at the theatre, and sealed my misery by making us personally acquainted. After that I was a frequent visitor at her house in the Plaza Real. I got to know her habits, and when she went out to parties I generally contrived to get invited too, my circle of friends being almost co-extensive with her own. It was summer-time, and on fine evenings she would mingle with the merry throng on the sea-wall. Heaven, what hours have I wasted pacing up and down the broad causeway, looking for a sign of her statuesque form ! Such symmetry and proportion were hers that she might have made a fortune as a sculptor's model, begad !” The Captain broke off here to replenish his glass, and his auditors implored him to continue his fascinating recital.

“ ‘ Barcelona is a lovely spot,’ he proceeded, courteously acceding to their importunity ; its population at the last census,—however, I won't trouble you with that.”

At this juncture Mr. Rock, who was happily imbibing his port wine, suddenly choked, and the anecdote was again suspended, much to Frank's annoyance. He sprang up, and administered

several severe pats on the back to his venerable preceptor, who, with the drops of the generous fluid trickling off the end of his nose, presented no very impressive spectacle.

“That’ll do,” he gasped, as soon as his symptoms began to succumb to this vigorous treatment; “go on, Ed—Mack.”

The Captain resumed the thread of his narrative. “We left off,” he said, “at the—oh yes, I remember. Meetings in the charming gardens of Barcelona, varied by occasional picnics at some place in the neighbouring hills, became of almost every-day occurrence. It was at one of our more distant excursions that I first became aware of the presence of a rival competitor for the favour of the adorable Eulalie. At first I thought little of it, and I will tell you why. The mistress of my affections had an ingenious device of silently informing me how I stood with her, whenever we met over the dinner-table. At that season stone fruit always made its appearance at one or other of the courses, and, under whatever form, she could never resist its luscious temptation. One day she told me that she had invented a kind of private telegraphic code by which to communicate her feelings regarding me without attracting the attention of others. ‘You must always contrive to get seated where you can see the stones

upon my plate, Edgardo,' said she, — the heartless jade never called me by any other name than Edgardo; and, like a fool, I really thought it meant something. Well, her plan was to put out an even number of stones on to her plate when she was pleased with me, and an odd number when I was in disgrace. I've often wondered since what she did when she had one more than she wanted. I don't believe she would have swallowed a peach-stone for any man alive. Things went straight enough for a while,—I counted even numbers night after night. However, my luck was not to last, and after my rival appeared upon the scene at one of our picnics it turned dead against me. Soon there was a fatal regularity about the unfavourable auspices which I was forced to recognize in her plate; our intercourse lost its old unconventional freedom, and we no longer put Spanish propriety to the blush with our gay pranks and festive escapades. By and by her signals stopped altogether — even the sort I dreaded. Driven to desperation, I tortured my brain to discover the cause of her ominous coldness. I knew well enough that nothing but the most cogent reason could induce her to forswear her favourite viands; and as there was no cholera at Barcelona then, I could think of but one malady to account for her strange abstinence,—

that villain—an Italian Count the fellow called himself—had stolen my Eulalie's heart away from me, its rightful lord. But I was patient, and determined to give her time to amend. Meanwhile, my unconscious acts of rudeness, occasioned by my secret torment, disgusted all my friends, and they began to openly avoid me. For instance, in my anxiety to see whether Eulalie would still persevere in her faithlessness, I used to jostle other people out of the way in order to sit near her at the dinner parties at which I was gradually becoming less and less welcome. Sometimes I would desert the partner to whom I had been assigned, and secure a vacant chair without respect to the age or sex of the person who ought really to have occupied it. Then I would snatch the *menu* out of my neighbour's hand, and glare wildly at it, with my hand pressed on my racking brow, to see how long I should have to wait before the fruit came. Naturally some foolish people were scandalised, and I got the reputation of being indecently fond of the pleasures of the table; but little I cared for their odious aspersions, as long as I could keep my eye on every morsel which passed my lady's dainty lips. All dinner-time my conversation would be disjointed and pointless, and as the critical moment approached, my

back would often, I fear, be turned upon the most accomplished blandishments that were ever practised by Spain's fairest hidalgos to captivate a poor devil.

“ At last one night at a masked ball I felt that my time had come, and that procrastination was no longer possible. I marked down the Count in spite of his disguise, and from a safe place of concealment saw him make straight for Eulalie. I watched them dance together, and when they disappeared, I tracked them to a curtained alcove, standing motionless behind the hangings, while the traitor declared his vile, calculating love. He paused, expecting the lady's answer, and I could bear it no more. With a well-directed kick from under the hanging, which hid all of me but my foot from their sight, I sent the viper reeling into her lap, and leaving them both a huddled mass upon the floor, stalked invisibly away. Next day I tossed my challenge through his open window, and we met before the sun went down. I never decline a civility, and when the fellow offered me his snuff-box before we engaged I suspected nothing, and politely accepted it, supposing the ceremony to be a national custom. It was fortunate, however, that I was not addicted to the elegant folly, and so took a very cautious whiff of the mixture.

Even that caused me to turn giddy and faint so suddenly, that I had only just time to scent treachery, and jerk the entire contents of the box in his face with my elbow, before I fell prostrate on the sward. You may be sure I didn't fall alone. The wretch's dastardly attempt to disable and then murder me at his leisure recoiled upon himself, and I recovered my faculties considerably before he did. I could not resist kicking his recumbent body as I left the ground, for there was no question of his fighting that day. The worst part of the whole business was that on my going to enquire after him at his residence later, it turned out that the rascal had fled, and I was baulked of my first chance of drawing blood in my Eulalie's cause; and now I've lost the second," added the Captain in a tone expressive of the deepest chagrin.

Frank had finished his third glass, and looked flushed and excited when Mack ended his story.

"Bravo! Captain," cried he, reaching out an unsteady hand for the bottle; "beastly rough on you, though, I mus' say." Mr. Rock helped him to the wine, and getting upon his feet he went on:—"Gentlemen, let me propose another health, —here's to my speedy revenge upon R."

"Why, how am I to know that isn't me?" asked Hiram, with a gesture of dismay.

“Well, it ain’t you,” replied Frank impatiently; “look here, I’ll say A. R.; will that suit you better?”

“As long as it isn’t H. R. you’re going to be revenged upon, I don’t mind who else it is, my dear young gent,” observed Mr. Rock, while Frank gulped down his portion, and flung the empty glass into the fireplace, laughing noisily at his performance.

After this climax had been reached the company soon broke up; Mr. Rock was summoned down-stairs, and Frank went home. If he had remained he would certainly have got drunk; as it was, the change to the open air came in time to prevent more serious consequences than a dull headache.

Left to themselves, Messrs. Rock and Edwards testified to their satisfaction each in his own way.

“Lucky find, that old map of Barcelona in your shop, eh?” said Edwards, after a period of silent satisfaction interspersed with occasional inward chuckles. “I flatter myself I made artistic use of that local colouring; gives an air of reality to the thing, and whets the imagination.”

“Excellent! my boy,” approved Mr. Rock: “your playing the fool, though, as you did once or twice, was almost too much for me.”

“It didn’t matter a scrap; he was too fuddled to suspect there was anything wrong. I expect

‘A. R.’ will hear from him after this,” and the speaker hugged himself.

“We can never be too grateful for the glorious fluke that brought the young soft-head floundering round my hook,” remarked the bookseller piously; “but we shall have to prime him up a bit more before the thing works out, depend upon it; and you must stay on here over Christmas. You’ve got nothing better to do, and are not likely to risk anything by hanging round for a while longer to keep matters straight.”

Suspicious people defeat their own ends. Edward told his accomplice that he had got a notion for disposing of the ring safely, but neither of them seemed to see that their only chance of effecting this with anything approaching security lay in sending it back immediately to its owner, together with a true account of how it came into their possession. Being naturally as honest and straightforward as they were secret and wary he would probably have accepted their explanation without hesitating, in spite of the somewhat startling coincidence of the futile burglary at Oakleigh. But they were bent upon voluntarily incurring dangers quite out of proportion to those which they had been so careful to avoid, and recklessly courted the temptation to commit fresh blunders in the future.

Consistent roguery is a difficult part to play : there is considerable annual mortality among the too sanguine aspirants to its rewards. The firm would have done better had it remained true to its old programme of sound retail transactions, instead of embarking on this new field of speculation. Most of us make indifferent whips when we take the reins of destiny into our own ambitious hands. Once set the wheels rolling under us, and we may find it impossible ever to pull up again before the car is wrecked.

CHAPTER III.

“ONE THING THOU LACKEST.”

“My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun ;
Coral is far more red than her lips’ red :
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun ;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask’d, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks ;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound ;
I grant I never saw a goddess go ;—
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground ;
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“TANTIVY, you precious pair, come for your walk.”

It was Ursula who spoke ; and the two dogs, answering to a single name, leaped from their respective baskets in her pretty boudoir,—or studio, as its mistress preferred to call it,—and hastened down-stairs to the front door which Aunt Joan was already opening.

We all know what happens when we “give a dog a bad name,” so it may be necessary to justify the terriers’ unusual but judicious appellation. The first syllable, then, was appropriate to the handsomely-marked complexion of the more sedate and sober animal ; while his brother, in case he might feel aggrieved by some suspicion of partiality in this otherwise baseless precedence, was compensated in the fairest manner possible with two syllables to his name instead of one. In spite of the hilarious ring of their title, which was not without an apt correspondence in their natures, they always restrained the exuberance of their spirits indoors, each being perfectly aware that it was as much as his place was worth to trifle with Miss Hilda’s staid and decorous prejudices. Their demeanour changed, however, directly they were in the open air ; and they frisked round the two ladies, or ran races with each other, keeping Ursula in a simmer of mirth.

They passed through the garden without meeting Arnold. Joanna had half a mind to call at the hotel and ask him to take them out for a sail, but she refrained from mentioning the subject to her companion, and they walked on towards the old town.

Burnport was filling. So many people came there to enjoy the advantages of sea-air out of the season, that the parade looked quite crowded

as they passed along it. The town band, "a thriving and popular institution," was performing its liveliest dance music, while an unusual display of the triumphs of millinery lent its own irresistible air of elegance and refinement to the scene, making it unnecessary to look in the shop-windows, as Aunt Joan remarked.

"And those are the sort of people they want to let vote," she said as they distanced a rouged and powdered dowager attended by a pair of daughters, the colour of whose hair contrasted in a marked manner with that of their complexions.

"What an imprudent Aunt Joan you are," whispered Ursula in reply, for they were within ear-shot of these three Graces when Miss Joanna vented her indignation. "Don't you think," she went on, "that some girls might have been a little more sensible if they had been allowed to take an interest in public affairs? Why, you know how you often like to talk to me about what is in the paper, and what splendid fights we have over it sometimes."

Aunt Joan sniffed impatiently: "It's a good thing your Aunt Hilda isn't here, Ursula, or she'd take you for a female Montague; and it's much worse for a woman to be a 'Red-hot Radical' than for a man, my dear."

"Well, I don't know what I am, and we haven't walked far enough to make me red-hot

yet, at any rate,” answered the girl with a merry smile; “but you don’t think there’s any real harm, Aunt Joan, in our taking an interest in as many things as possible, do you?”

“That depends on the sort of interest you take. Women who don’t marry, and have to support themselves, must take to something to keep out of the workhouse, I suppose. Your Aunt and I took to keeping a school, and of course I don’t see any harm in that.”

“But it surely wasn’t just to keep out of the workhouse that you worked so hard,” pleaded Ursula. “I mean, you would have taken up something—not education, perhaps—just the same if you had not been obliged to earn money, wouldn’t you?”

“I’m sure I can’t say, my dear,” replied Miss Joanna, ruminating. “Hilda might have done so; directly she was set free she took to good works, and all that sort of thing. But I’m a lazy creature, and don’t do anything now. Why, I’m actually more than lazy,—I’m quite a dog in the manger, you know; for I often wish she wouldn’t busy herself as she does.”

“Nonsense! Aunt Joan; you do a heap of things. You read, and play, and you would have drawn a great deal better than I ever shall if you had had time to attend to it. Besides, you manage the house, and look after the tradespeople.”

“ Well, of course I do, Ursula. But every one has to do that for themselves to some extent, so it can't count in my case. Now I'll tell you what I think about it. Women ought to work in a womanly way, and not attempt to caricature men ; they should be above emulating the male portion of humanity any more in their talk, or thought, or actions, than in the dress they wear. There are some things men can do better than women, and other things women can do better than men. Very well, then ; let each sex mind its own business—surely there's no lack of work for both of them to do, eh ? ”

Ursula's assent to this last proposition was somewhat qualified : “ There ought to be enough, at any rate, Aunt Joan.”

“ There is, my dear, there is,” returned Joanna earnestly. “ If folks sit still with arrears of work staring them in the face, and make up their minds to do nothing but grumble just because they would prefer another occupation which is not really adapted to them, I'm not going to waste any sympathy upon 'em.”

“ Not if they neglect what they ought to do for something less important,” replied Ursula, an eager flush suffusing her whole face as she put her arm through Joanna's ; “ but that isn't exactly what I meant. Suppose a woman happens to have very few of these simple,

straightforward duties, and finds that she has a good deal of spare time after performing them, you wouldn't refuse to let her try the experiment of undertaking a new occupation for herself only because men had been beforehand, and succeeded in it first, would you, Aunt Joan, dear ? ”

They walked on a little way, and halting at the barrier where the sea-wall came to an end, stood still to lean upon it and rest ; they had left the fashionable lounge far behind them now, and there was no one near but a few sturdy little urchins, fishermen's children, playing on the beach below.

“ I won't say what I might do in any particular case,” resumed Joanna, “ but I fancy that if women were at all inclined generally to act as you say there would soon be a most disagreeable and dangerous rivalry between them and men. No, my dear, depend upon it that, married or unmarried, women are not intended to use their power openly, however great it may secretly be. Where have I read—in some poet, I think—that women should not be so foolish as ‘ to offer war where they should kneel for peace ’ ? And then he goes on to say something about our bodily weakness being a sign that we are not intended to take a prominent part in the world. We should break down under the exertion, you know. Just think what the House of Commons

would be with a lot of irreconcilable ladies below the gangway. Why, I shouldn't wonder if not a single pair of female M.P.'s would ever be got to agree on any public matter whatever, but would rather go off into hysterics first."

Ursula was amused at this unflattering picture; there was no more resemblance to what is technically known as the "woman of mind" in her than in her Aunt. At the same time she was inclined to think that Miss Joanna's way of looking at the question was scarcely impartial, though her charity made great amends for her predilections.

"Well, but the same argument would have kept women back in the place they occupied in old heathen times," the girl remonstrated, soon becoming serious again. "If they had always been afraid of seeming to rival men they would have remained to this day the common household drudges they once were."

"I don't believe they were all exactly that in most ancient States," remarked Joanna, "and some English women are not much better off now. But even supposing our condition has improved as much as you think, we owe it all to Christianity, and I don't believe in trying to improve any further on the position it has given us. We have since held an influence over the lords of creation which it is our right and our

duty to maintain and exercise, but not to extend or misuse.” (Aunt Joan evidently regarded the two last expressions as almost synonymous.) “I don’t suppose,” she went on, “that a man can have any more valuable possession than the influence of a good woman; the best men are always ready to acknowledge its pricelessness. Solomon did so, and we have more liberty of action than the women of his day. Well, my dear, I believe our sphere of usefulness has already been enlarged as much as is possible without running great risk. If we set to work to usurp more influence than this, be sure we shall forfeit that which has been ours so long.”

This announcement of Joanna’s convictions clenched the argument. Ursula saw that no good would come from pursuing it further, and though she did not pretend to be convinced, began to talk about something else. In the afternoon she went to her room to paint, and when the light waned, and she was forced to lay down the brush, her thoughts wandered back to the conversation of the morning.

Why should women lessen their influence by enlarging their experience? This puzzled her. “I wonder what sort of women influence men most?” she thought,—a crucial test this, if only it could be carried out, and a Royal Commission armed with full powers to frame a return

based upon trustworthy statistics. Perhaps the first difficulty attendant on such an inquiry would be the selection and description of the male objects of any influence save that of impulse or pocket. For in the spiritual union of souls a man is incapable of being thus acted upon unless he is conscious of something beyond his carnal circumstances. He may indeed be disturbed by stray specimens of femineity crossing his path, — and what man is entirely cut off from the society of the more numerous sex? He may be held or goaded to his destruction by female artifice and the fatal ascendancy which he has too easily yielded to it. The Sirens and the Furies were not more terrible than the progeny to whom their ghoulish trade has descended. So it has been, and must always be till men unite to be the pioneers of womanhood's triumphant progress, and make smooth paths for chastity and innocence to walk in.

But Ursula knew nothing of these things ; her anxiety was to solve the simple problem, What does a good man love and reverence in a woman? Can it be her ignorance of the world of Nature, and her consequent inability to do more than dabble miserably in Art? Is it her vacuity on every abstract topic, her inhuman callousness to the infinitude of unspeakable emotions, ideas, impressions, sympathies, which well forth, an

inexhaustible flood, in every developed mind, making it the sure index of preceding ages, the epitome of a deathless future ?

“ Our mortal parts may wrapt in cere-cloths lie :
Great spirits never with their bodies die.”

Such spirits can be but feebly held within the sickly bounds of flesh even while their nominal subjection to its laws remains. Elysium's limitless expanse is spread continually before their roving gaze ; they are possessed by a craving that may not be quenched for the cheer of those eternal pastures ; they are supported by their anticipation of the hospitality of Heaven. Nor is it to be thought of that they should take as human participants in these holy mysteries any whose joys and sorrows do not extend further than the larders and pig-troughs of their narrow concrete associations. Shall those whose veins have begun to flow with purifying ichor stain their new-gotten nobility—the most illustrious of patents, for all that—by intermixture with a baser and thinner fluid ? Wise men read a deeper meaning in the miracle at Cana than this, and would taste the rich wine of marriage sheer, or not at all. Certainly there are women whose merits shine so conspicuous that their dull wit or mental incapacity is all but effaced, merits to which the highest honour that men can pay is poor and incommensurate with their desert.

Many are the meek and quiet souls whom men in their frowardness have despised and wronged, —yes, and whose memory they have lived, perhaps, to cherish tenderly. Such figures must be familiar guests at most firesides, the angels whose blessed shadows darken unawares the doorways of our homes. And yet our love, when it is not withheld from these simple comforters, can scarcely be attracted by, but rather in spite of, their defects. Why should disparity in intellect be considered no serious obstacle to matrimony, when disparity in virtue is recognized as leading to a ruinous result? A wife's influence over her husband must indeed be small if she is unable to appreciate the objects of his sincerest attention, if she must resign the matronly office of administering the intelligent solace and encouragement needed to brace him for his highest endeavours, and yield to others the noble duty which she is not qualified to perform. Joanna Blunsden had a comforting doctrine that men and women are conveniently provided with natures complementary to each other, and to hear her discuss this theory one would have supposed that mutual contradiction was the safeguard of the married state. But whatever grain of truth there may have been in her speculations, there never was a more preposterous paradox than that of imagining any real anti-

pathy to be essential to the unity of a wedded pair. The expression of such an opinion too often leads to the belief that the larger half of creation ought to stand still while the stronger inevitably extends its landmarks. Happily, however, for the existence of the human race this prejudice does not operate universally. Emigrants, when they go out to search for new lands, and improved chances of bread-winning, do not leave their help-meets to starve in the old country ; and some day men and women will perceive the suicidal inconsistency of not carrying out the same principle in other matters.

It is difficult to translate one's own thoughts into words sometimes, and the difficulty of doing so for other people is proportionately greater. The interpretation here essayed, therefore, may or may not correctly embody the upshot of Ursula's reverie ; and those of her friends who do not hold with such sentiments are not in the least bound to attribute them to her. She had her faults, to be sure, but self-assertion was not one of them, nor did she regard her own opinion as anything especially remarkable, or worth having. On the other hand, she was not prim ; her character was not without that strain of wayward *abandon* which is part of the peculiarity of youth, and of which Aunt Joan herself retained a considerable share. If there was any quality in

Ursula to prevent her from being either insipid or forward it was her pride ; for she was proud. She used to shock other girls of her acquaintance by often openly declining to accept their dogmas on the mere strength of parental or fraternal authority. They gradually got used to such treatment, however, and pitied Ursula without being angry with her ; for her differences from them were never expressed in an intentionally irritating way. Her strange pride had shown itself in her school-days by making her indifferent to the opinions of her companions regarding herself. She had thus become more popular with the younger than with the elder children, and as she never bestirred herself to make a friend of her own age and standing she never made one. Here, again, her pride kept her from self-reproach. "If other people won't take to me on my own merits, I won't force myself upon them ;" this was the consolation she was in the habit of repeating when her head was on her pillow, and she was safe from interruption. Perhaps, had any of those among her schoolfellows with whom she was least of all a favourite surprised her as she lay there awake, her hands clenched, and her lips tightly compressed to keep down the instinct which bids all young creatures look outward for support, they might have swallowed their natural resentment at her independent behaviour, and

generously forgotten their hasty dislike of the determined little person. But this never happened, and Aunt Joan still remained, as she always had been, the only friend her niece knew.

So things went on when the ladies came to live at Burnport, and the school passed into other hands. The girl's character had developed early; at twenty her will was stronger than many a man's, and her ability to carry out in an unpretentious way any purpose which she might form fully confirmed. The old sense of repression had completely passed away, blotted out by her patient contempt; while the pride which had prompted her successful resistance threatened to dominate her too completely now that there was nothing farther to resist. Her love for Joanna still kept her heart warm, and her sympathies prompt; but even that dear patroness was beginning to understand how withered her charge's whole future life might become when the one object round which the girl's affections clung was removed, and nothing left to fill the void. Indeed, it did not seem unlikely that Ursula,—so fettered and confined was her devotion,—would not even continue to feel this void for long, but would lapse into the unregenerate condition of never having loved at all; for the devotion that can centre itself entirely upon a single person must shortly

sicken and dwindle from inanition, till at last with the vanishing of its object it too vanishes, sunk in the torpor from which the weak and unsubstantial stimulants of memory are powerless to rouse it.

There was something of ironical pathos in the fact that such rare capacity for endurance should be destined to defeat the very happiness which at first sight it might have seemed calculated to secure,—that the thing which should have been for Ursula's health should become to her an occasion of falling. Joanna watched her with anxious eyes as she went about her daily occupations, blithe and contented enough so long as her protectress was within call. There was an iron composure in the girl under all her sprightly hilarity which sorely perplexed the elder woman. She was half afraid of the superabundant strength pent up within that slight, firm frame, and dreaded what it might portend,—dreaded, too, the rapidly approaching day when Ursula would become her own mistress, and the effect upon her of the sad avowal of her birth and forlorn condition that must then be made. The thought of another calamity which had given Joanna much disquiet in years gone by did not trouble her now; time had inured her to it, and her familiarity with the logic that all the while pointed to one pitiless conclusion had bred contempt. There had been

a time when she was always preparing to face the worst, but it never came, and she had unconsciously formed the conviction that it never would. Otherwise she might have perceived that the girl's happiness was not to be so cheaply bought; that her fortitude involved in it a presage at least as hopeful as it was menacing,—that if her salvation was to be riveted by a thunderbolt, she was better fitted than others to sustain the desperate remedy.

Ursula's pride was the pride of untried innocence. All her life through she had been tenderly shielded from evil: doing no harm, and receiving none, she had learned to despise the power of ill, and laugh at the alarm which it inspires. She regarded it as something too distant to be afraid of; she even secretly thought it would be pleasant rather than the reverse to stand up in her white virtue, and deliver a crushing blow at its insidious phalanx. She lived to repent of her boastful folly. But actual contact with sorrow is no unnecessary part of the development of even the finest natures, and a woman's innocence may be too dearly bought if it can be maintained only at the price of tenderness. Unwrinkled loveliness is often cheap and commonplace enough, though we refuse to allow with Bacon (what could he have been eating to make him think it!) that none but the aged are properly to be

called beautiful. No ; there are graces more excellent than any that we can barter to secure them, and for which the precarious hothouse bloom of youth, at any rate, ought to be sacrificed without a regretful backward glance.

Ursula has not lived to repent the eager “joy of battle” which animated her to meet trials bravely, any more than the high confidence—overweening as it doubtless was—which fostered that stern emotion. For without these accidents the purified aspirations that now invigorate her, no less than the glad might and wealth of sweetness they impart to her life, must have remained for her to this day unattainable.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS AT OAKLEIGH.

“ He loved the spot—
Who does not love his native soil?—He prized
The ancient rural character, composed
Of simple manners, feelings unsuppress’d
And undisguised, and strong and serious thought.”

The Excursion.

“ Now, my dears, you may each take another piece of cake all round, and I’ll tell you a story while you sit still and rest.”

It was Christmas day, and Arnold was back at Oakleigh. That evening was to witness the long-promised gathering of tenants and neighbours, commencing with a substantial dinner in the hall, which was capable of being converted into a very snug apartment in spite of its size; and ending with a dance, to take place as soon as the tables and chairs could be got out of the way. This was the original plan; but the children—at least, the younger ones—being incapable of taking part in the enjoyment of a ‘grown-up’

party on equal terms with their elders, Arnold had confirmed their good opinion of him by entertaining them in the afternoon with a Christmas tree, and other seasonable delights. The tree was rapidly cleared of its sparkling toys, and the children romped about the house till they were summoned to the dining-room, where a sumptuous tea was spread. Mrs. Marchpane presided, assisted by some of the elder girls who were obliged to go home for the evening to keep house while their relations were at the party. They were so good about making this sacrifice that Arnold rashly engaged himself by the most solemn pledges to give a dance on the first available opportunity for their special benefit, and the bustling little housekeeper managed to find a suitable present for each of them out of the spoils of cupboards and store-rooms as an earnest of his serious intentions.

There was to be a magic-lantern exhibition after tea, but there was still an interval which Arnold could think of no better way of filling than by trying to amuse the children quietly with a story. Several of them looked as if they required something to cool them down after their boisterous exertions; so he got them to gather round the fire, and with one tiny boy asleep on his knee, he collected his ideas for a minute or two, and then began:—

“Once upon a time there was a small but
“very wise child called Peggy : she had a whole
“string of other names, but that is the only one
“I can remember. Now there can be no doubt
“at all that Peggy really was a wonderful girl.
“In the first place she was cleverer than most
“children of her own age, and knew a great deal
“more about things than they did. I should be
“sorry to say how soon after she was born she
“could spell her own beautiful name, for fear
“you wouldn’t believe me. Then she was always
“setting other people right, charging nothing
“for it ; she never hesitated to take her elder
“brothers and sisters to task, speaking to them
“quite freely about their faults, for which, you
“may be sure, they were deeply grateful. I am
“sorry to say, however, that her friends did not
“always show their appreciation of her excellent
“qualities in the nicest way. We all know how
“rude boys generally are : well, this poor Peggy
“had one fearful young brother who actually
“dared to call her his ‘guide to useless know-
“ledge.’ Did you ever hear of such shocking
“perverseness ! He refused to take her as his
“pattern whenever she pointed out how good
“and prosperous he might be, if he would only
“do so, abusing her openly to her face for her
“modest little suggestions. Oh, she felt herself
“at times to be just thrown away upon that

“naughty scamp of a boy, did this amiable sister.

“But there are one or two more of her good points which I ought not to pass over. She used to take the very greatest care to find out what was proper, and do it. She never believed anything, even things in books,—except, of course, history, grammar, and geography books—without making all sorts of enquiries first to find out whether grown-up people believed them. Sometimes, however, this carefulness led her into mistakes which, if she had only been a trifle stupider, she would not have made. For instance, she used to say boldly that there was not a word of truth in stories about fairies, elves, goblins, witches, and all those dear creatures whom no one, perhaps, has ever seen quite distinctly but in dreams. When her brother Tom would ask her why she insisted upon reading geography and history instead of fairy tales, she would reply that the wise teacher at her school did not like them, and very much preferred facts and figures.

“‘Which is the reason, my dear Tom,’ she used to add sweetly, ‘why I prefer them too. Just hear me say the dates of my kings and queens, will you?’

“That was certainly rather thoughtless of

“her, because it is quite well known that nothing
“but sheer obstinacy prevents grown-up folks
“from finding out more about elves and witches
“for the young people, who have to go to bed
“early, and so get few opportunities of knowing
“anything about the wonderful things that go
“on round their cosy homes under the moon.
“We might discover that witches were not half
“so bad as they are sometimes made out. Just
“fancy what a relief it would be if they turned
“out to be only kind, harmless old grannies, in
“spite of their terrible hooked noses and bent
“backs! I am almost certain that is what they
“are really, and nothing has ever happened to
“make me think differently. But the grown-ups
“are too lazy to help us here; they know it
“would be troublesome to find out all about
“such things, so they pretend not to believe in
“them.

“Well, it was Christmas Eve, and Peggy had
“gone to bed earlier than usual because she did
“not want to lose anything of the next day by
“feeling the least bit sleepy. She was not tired,
“however, and it was not very strange that she
“should wake in the middle of the night, wonder-
“dering why morning was so long in coming.
“But what was strange, making her open her
“eyes very wide indeed, was a wonderful pale
“light at the end of her bed,—not to be

“mistaken for daylight even by this half-awake
“Miss Peggy,—which seemed to come from the
“figure of a dreadfully thin and hideous pigmy,
“and to be streaming out from him at every
“pore like a sort of moonshine perspiration.
“Peggy was much surprised to see this ill-
“mannered person sitting, with his legs crossed
“and his arms a-kimbo, against her bed-post,—
“at that time of night too; but, to tell the
“truth, she was more shocked than surprised,
“for she could not help feeling ashamed of having
“anything to do with a creature so unpleasantly
“like a fairy, though an exceedingly ugly one;
“and the only kind of guardian angel she knew
“of was herself, and people like her, who were
“always setting their friends straight.

“Her queer visitor knew exactly what she
“was thinking, which proves, of course, that he
“was actually the real fairy he seemed to be.

“‘Yes,’ he said, in a hollow, far-away voice,
“‘yes, you small horror, it’s no mistake this
“time; you see me now, do you? And you
“shall hear me, too, before I’ve done with you.
“Once I was a prince as beautiful as the rest of
“my royal relatives; now I’m about the ugliest
“goblin going, and they’re all beginning to cut
“me,—the others are—because I ain’t what I
“was, and the line must be drawn somewheres,
“that’s what they say. And when I tell ’em it

“ain’t my fault, and it’s you as is a-doin’ of it
“all, they just says, “Get her to draw the line,
“then,” says they; for it’s you as is at the
“bottom of it all, you disgraceful thing, you!”

“This was too much for Peggy: to be obliged
“to see the imp was bad enough, but to be
“actually abused by *it*. What would her teacher
“say!

“‘You’re not in the grammar,’ she said boldly,
“‘and don’t deserve to be, either. Why, you
“can’t speak six words without breaking some
“rule or other. For instance’——

“‘Shut up!’ interrupted the goblin, making
“an awful face; ‘if you dare to explain any-
“thing to me, I’ll throttle you; by all the
“mountains in the moon I will!’

“‘What a nasty temper!’ thought Peggy.
“She would have said so straight out, only she
“was getting rather uncomfortable: it—the
“creature before her—had such a natural and
“life-like way with it.

“‘Now mind, no more interruptions, if you
“please;’ and the goblin drew his miserable
“little legs up to his chin, glaring at her over
“his knees with his tiny red eyes. ‘Interrupt
“me, or correct my grammar again, and I’ll bite
“you!’

“He disclosed two rows of sharp white teeth
“in a grin that made her feel quite unwell, and

“ went on with a matter-of-fact air, as though
“ what he was saying was well known to every-
“ body, and could not possibly be doubted by
“ anyone.

“ All children have such a fairy prince or
“ princess told off to attend to them, and look
“ after their interests. Perhaps you think there
“ must be a great many fairy princes and prin-
“ cesses at that rate, and so there are—millions
“ of ’em. But as there are lots more fairies than
“ stupid human beings, they aren’t all princes
“ and princesses at once, you see, though they
“ all get the chance in turn of being raised to
“ royal rank. And it’s like this,—for you are
“ such a terrible dunce that you would never
“ find it out for yourself, but I must come and
“ tell you :—Every baby that’s born is put down
“ to the next fairy on the list, the boys to the
“ fairy women, and the girls to the fairy men,
“ whereupon these fairies become princes and
“ princesses. All their royal highnesses start
“ fair, that is to say they begin by being equally
“ beautiful and accomplished ; but what they
“ will turn out afterwards is just a piece of luck,
“ and depends entirely upon the human children
“ to whom they are allotted. If those children
“ are, as they should be, firm believers in fairies
“ and other unseen things which their ridiculous
“ grammars and geographies say nothing about,

“ then we, their protectors, have a good time of
“ it, keeping our good looks, and our position
“ among the fashionable inhabitants of fairyland.
“ Otherwise we get gradually plainer and uglier
“ every day, our limbs become deformed, our
“ noses turn blue and our eyes red, our cheeks
“ fall in and our hair falls off, or else roofs us in
“ with a most inconvenient sort of door-mat.
“ Then, instead of getting pensioned off hand-
“ somely when our boy and girl brats grow up
“ and insist upon doing without us, we are
“ thrown out of employment without a prospect
“ of board and lodging except what we can get
“ by slaving for them low wizards and magicians,
“ which ain’t fit occupation for a respectable
“ goblin, let alone one as has been no end of a
“ swell himself.’

“ Here the poor thing began to cry, and Peggy
“ forgot her disgust at his bad mistakes in gram-
“ mar. She even reflected that she herself might
“ be answerable for that too, remembering that
“ his former great friends would have nothing to
“ do with him now that he was evidently doomed
“ to end his days in the workhouse which the
“ fairies keep for used-up goblins. She felt that
“ he was too much overcome to attempt to bite
“ her now, so she plucked up her failing courage
“ with the kind wish to take off his attention
“ from his wrongs by changing the subject.

“ ‘I suppose my brother Tom’s princess is not quite so’—she stopped, blushing to think that she had nearly called her visitor ugly to his face.

“ ‘Ah!’ said he, heaving a great sigh, ‘I fell in love with her years ago, when we first met; but of course my case is hopeless after what has happened to me. You have no idea how beautiful she is still,—scarcely changed at all, while I’—a sob choked his voice, and he stood on his head for half a minute, balancing the high, stiff peak of his hat on the narrow ledge of the footboard to Peggy’s bed, in an agony of grief.

“ ‘What could she do? He appeared to suffer so that she could not help pitying him very much, and the end of it was that she actually consented to try believing in fairies—especially in her own fairy—for a year.

“ ‘Then we can meet again, and I can see what it has done for you,’ said she; ‘but I’m afraid it will be very hard for me, you know; it may even lose me the grammar prize of my class, there’s no telling.’

“ ‘Anyhow, it’ll do *me* good, if I’m not past it already,’ replied her odd protector, unfolding a pair of tiny gossamer wings to fly away up the chimney. ‘Ha, ha; when I come back next Christmas Eve you won’t know me,’ and off he went almost gaily, leaving Miss Peggy

“to think how foolish it was of her to give in so easily to a sprite like this ; no bigger than her own small thumb.

“And yet, somehow, she woke up the next morning feeling glad and cheerful enough. “Perhaps by this time she may have taken quite kindly to Tom’s stories and fancies ; indeed I am pretty sure she has ; aren’t you ?”

The magic lantern was ready, and Arnold led off his delighted party at once to see its wonderful pictures. He was a little afraid, if the truth must be told, that his parable might have been rather too much for most of them. It was probably his remembrance of the way in which they had all been stuffing themselves at tea that suggested to his mind the old proverb relating to the unprofitableness of regaling certain animals of omnivorous habits with marine treasures of a substance difficult to digest. At any rate they were harmless and placable little pigs in the present case ; and though perhaps a trifle disappointed at having been offered pearls instead of the best husks, they had the decency not to turn and rend their entertainer.

Scarcely had the children been got out of the house when the guests of the evening began to arrive. The Daltons came early, as they were to assist the master of the house in dispensing his hospitality. Then there was Armitage, and

several representatives of two or three families of gentlefolks in the neighbourhood. Besides this, there were all the tenants and their wives, to say nothing of a plentiful sprinkling of grown up sons and daughters. Last, but by no means least, there were one or two Burfield tradespeople, notably the mayor, who came up the steps into the hall in ponderous state, fast anchored to the wife of his capacious bosom, a lady of so much weight that Rubens himself could scarcely have done justice to her charms. Mr. Vincent Hewitt had always been described in the local newspapers and "posters" by the mysterious letters T. C. immediately following his name ever since Arnold could remember anything about him. These very letters had, in fact, formed the subject of the first conversation between our hero and his old friend the haberdasher; for it was in that respectable occupation that the excellent mayor found a sufficient opportunity for the exercise of his commercial instincts. The boy was learning to read, and proud of this new faculty, would make every printed placard he met with an excuse for testing it. Now there was no name more conspicuously posted up all over the little town than Mr. Hewitt's, and to it were always suffixed those two puzzling initials. Arnold scorned to ask his nurse for an explanation of them; so one day, seeing the haberdasher

standing in the sun outside his shop, he boldly accosted him, and asked the meaning of the appendage to his name.

"It's a mark of rank, my little sir," replied Mr. Hewitt, puffing out his cheeks with an important air.

"What's that?" enquired the child innocently.

"Why, you don't mean to say you don't know what *rank* is?" exclaimed Mr. Hewitt; and he looked at Arnold in a despairing way, as if he thought the boy's education must have been left till so late that little could now be done to avert life-long imbecility.

"Well, you see," he went on slowly, "if you don't know what rank is, I don't think you'll understand anything I tell you about it. So you want me to tell you what V.'Ewitt, T. C. means, do you? You've seen it all about the town, and you can't rest till you know all about it, can't you? So you've come to V.'Ewitt himself as being the likeliest person to tell you, eh? That's sensible, at any rate. Well, now, young gentleman, T. C. might mean *Terrible Character*; have you ever thought of that? No, of course you ain't; and it don't mean that at all, but just simply *Town Councillor*," and Mr. Hewitt stepped back to catch the full effect of this declaration of his civic importance upon his small auditor. "That's the 'ighest rank in this township next

to the mayor," he added, satisfied with what he conceived to be the boy's awed demeanour; "and don't you be surprised to see me a sitting on the mayor's seat in the town 'all myself one of these days."

Arnold recollected the circumstance as he welcomed the new mayor to Oakleigh, and gravely congratulated him on the fulfilment of his prophecy.

"V.'Ewitt is not proud, sir," remarked that great functionary, after gracefully acknowledging the compliment, "and I am glad to see you have not stood still neither, Mr. Robur." He then with prompt delicacy presented his lady wife in order to save his host the embarrassment of replying to his condescension.

Only one of the friends whom he had invited failed Arnold that evening; but the vacant place was not an easy one to fill, for it was Paston, whose work kept him away against his will. "You know that I am always uncertain when stern Duty shall lay her icy paw on her votary's shoulder," he had written to Robur; "*She* is the goddess whom *I* serve." The doctor was not much in the habit of italicising his letters, and his deviation from principle on the present occasion was doubtless to be attributed to the receipt of a lengthy epistle from Arnold a short time before, containing an enthusiastic account of

Burnport and its attractions, with frequent and significant references to the household on East Rise.

Grace Dalton looked charming in her pretty dress. Her good qualities may not have been very striking, but she certainly understood how to make the most of soft hues, and a rich texture. Arnold was somewhat surprised to see that Frank had done him the honour of accepting the general invitation which had been despatched to Beau Séjour. He seemed to hover about his sister most assiduously, never letting her go out of his sight even when she was engaged with other people. Arnold could not but be struck by this change for the better, as he thought it. The wild cub had been tamed at last, then, and his sister's influence was succeeding where rougher discipline had failed. Grace asked eagerly after her old school-mistresses, and was delighted with the messages for her which Arnold had been commissioned to deliver. Finding that she, too, held Miss Joanna in high esteem he launched out into eulogy of that lady's virtues till Grace declared that she was sure both the sisters were confirmed spinsters, and would neither of them ever requite his hopeless attachment.

"You might have more chance with their niece, though," she went on ; " poor little Ursula ; I often wonder what she has grown up like, she

used to be such a reserved, friendless sort of child."

"She's not so very little now," remarked Arnold; "I don't suppose there is much difference in height between her and Miss Joanna; and you know she is decidedly tall. As to her being reserved,—well, I dare say she is that still; but it's not at all unusually apparent. She is perfectly frank and open, I mean; but at the same time there is probably a good deal more in her than one might bargain for after just a few casual meetings."

"Is that all you've seen of her, then?" asked Grace demurely.

"I saw her whenever I went to the house, and that was as often as I liked," was the reply.

"Is she pretty?"

"Yes."

"What a dear old body!" exclaimed Grace, suddenly breaking off, and looking in the direction of an aged woman who was talking to Armitage; "do let's go and hear what they are saying." He complied gladly, and they approached within earshot of the homely old dame and her companion.

"Firfield was my maiden home," they heard her tell the clergyman. "My father was a soldier, sir, and he left his right arm on the battle-field; that was at Waterloo. Dear sakes,

he was as proud o' that bit o' stump of his as if they'd given him a new arm instead o' chopping off the old one. How long be that ago, sir? They was asking of me only t'other day, but the rheumatiz hev got into my mem'ry, I dew b'lieve."

"Sixty odd years ago now, mother; don't you keep an almanac?"

"Oh dear yes, sir, to be sure I dew. And I looked and looked, but I couldn't find it. You see, I've marked it with a big black cross at the day my poor old man was born, and the day he died; and whenever I looks at it I can see nowt but those two black crosses, sir. D'ye mind my poor old man's grave in the churchyard, Mr. Armitage? He'd 'a bin eighty-nine last Thursday, if so be as the Almighty hadn't wanted him."

"How old are you yourself, mother?"

"Oh, not so old as that, sir," she replied; "there was a matter of nigh upon ten years' difference between us. But it's a sore trial for a poor body to live out the end of life alone; I pray you may never know it, sir," she added, turning to Robur.

"Don't you think it will make you more contented to go when the time comes?" said he.

"Aye, to be sure it will. But then, ye know, us poor folk have mostly a hard job to live

decent-like at all ; so it's scarce ever so bad for us to die as for our betters." Arnold thought, as he turned to the next group, that the qualms which the approach of death sometimes inspires in these "betters" were not always attributable to such an innocent cause as their superior command over the means of a comfortable existence.

A flushed domestic soon made his appearance with the welcome tidings that the dinner was served. His method of making this announcement was highly original, and worthy of the occasion. He did not stand at the door with the bland importance of a town-bred waiter, and communicate his intelligence to the host in the audible, yet mellifluous tone endeared by tradition to fashionable diners-out. Working his way through the crowd of guests like some conventional spy or detective of transpontine drama, he confidentially imparted the good news to each member of the company severally, button-holing them for the purpose in a desperate state of nervous bewilderment, till Arnold suddenly divined the state of affairs, and cut the matter short by inviting Gibbins to lead the way to the banquet with Mrs. Dalton, who had graciously consented to act as that philosopher's partner for the evening. It was a goodly spectacle to see the decorous air with which Joshua accepted the privilege thus conferred upon him, and put

himself in the forefront of the advance upon the victuals. Grace, who brought up the rear on Arnold's arm, could not forbear a smile as she took her seat next him at the top of the table, and caught a glimpse of the bailiff's punctilious gallantries to her mother at the other end.

"Doesn't it remind you of Solomon doing the honours for the Queen of Sheba?" she whispered to her companion.

It was a merry gathering. So many sat down to dinner, and they all had such healthy country appetites, that every dish was sent away empty as soon as it was set on; and beyond the removal of well-scraped trenchers, and the substitution of fresh ones, the guests waited upon each other. This gave rise to a most unusual and edifying display of chivalry on the part of the men, and it is possible that the female relations of these rustic knights and squires had seldom seen them appear to more advantage. Even Frank, though he was at first heartily disgusted to find that a special waiter had not been told off to stand behind his chair, and attend to no one else, was compelled for very shame to make himself moderately useful to his neighbour, a pretty, wholesome looking-girl, who, to tell the truth, was not a little fluttered at her proximity to the lackadaisical young gentleman. She had been quite frightened when he asked her in his

off-hand way to accept his protection, and now felt that she could have waited upon him a great deal more expeditiously than he did upon her. Frank was not a particularly susceptible youth, or he might have made more out of the company of this simple Hebe. When she took off her white cotton gloves, and took up her knife and fork with two very red little hands, preparatory to making no undecided attack upon a plateful of roast beef, Master Frank's gentlemanly instincts drew him to make a shuddering comparison between the hue of those useful members and that of the satisfying viand upon which they were engaged. Nevertheless, he did not allow the nauseating thought to check more than temporarily his charitable feelings towards its unconscious cause. The rosy maiden's first helping had hardly been despatched when Frank, mustering all his conversational resource, turned to her, and inquired if she had ever been to London.

"Oh dear no, sir," was the reply, accompanied with a blush that some ladies would have envied. "Have you?" she added ingenuously.

Frank's pity kept him silent for a minute or two before he could return an answer.

"Of course I have," he said, as soon as he could speak; "go there often, you know; see heaps of things,—nothing like it anywhere.

Why, everybody," — he stopped, hindered by some vague intuition that he had better not continue what he was going to say; so with admirable tact he gave his sentence another turn; "everybody ought to go to London, you know."

"My Aunt Sarah, who died last year, went up to London once, and she used to say she thought we were better off down here in the country. That was why father never went, nor mother neither; aunt always advised them not to go. 'Let alone the trouble of getting there, what better sight can you see than Burfield Fair, when it comes round?' That was how she used to end up whenever she talked about going up to see the sights."

Frank was scandalised; he could not hear one of the privileges of wealth depreciated in this way on the obsolete authority of a deceased aunt without positive pain. The rich man perforce sets a higher value on the pleasures that his money can procure him than his poor neighbours. Travelling on the Continent used to be a fashionable and much vaunted amusement mainly because it could only be done effectively on a long purse. Thus many of us graduate our admiration for the works of Nature and of Art by an exact scale, corresponding for the most part with the difficulty or expense

incurred for the sake of beholding such objects. If the Falls of Niagara were situated in this country we should probably think very little of them; their accessibility would rob them of a great part of their charm. Rich people are sworn by tacit consent to make the most of their position. What would be the good of their lucre if they could not make their poor relations envious by pretending to enjoy themselves hugely? A millionaire, whose fortune has lately come to him in a manner no more expected than deserved, paid a visit to a certain English museum of casts a few years ago, his income at that time amounting to about a couple of hundreds a-year. The friend with whom he went was a humble votary of the old Greek masters, and remained standing so long before a fine cast of the statue commonly known as the Venus of Milo that his comrade could not contain his impatience. "Come along," he growled, "it's enough to give one the toothache staring at that armless creature with all her clothes dropping off." Now that his revenue yields five times as many thousands as formerly he received hundreds, however, his tune has modulated in proportion, and he can talk for hours together of the marvellous relics of antiquity to be seen at the Louvre or the Vatican. Frank Dalton's culture belonged to much the

same order ; though it may be doubted whether he had the capacity to take even this flimsy layer of French polish.

“Last year father took me and my brothers and sisters to the fair, and we saw the African snake-charmer,” remarked his partner, venturing to take her eyes off her plate again after a long interval. “Did you see him, Mr. Dalton ? He let the nasty great things climb all over him, and didn’t seem a bit frightened. Why, he even kissed them ; ugh ! But father said the snakes had not got any fangs to bite him with, so it wasn’t really dangerous at all. Do you think that can be true ?”

“I saw the fellow myself,” said Frank, pompously. “The snakes couldn’t have been real ones, you know ; at least I don’t see how he could have taken the stings out of their tails without being stung.”

It so happened that Grace, who was close by, heard this unlucky observation of her brother’s, and her end of the table was soon in a roar at the joke. The perpetrator made a feeble effort to join the general laugh against himself, but this proved abortive, as he could not understand precisely what his mistake had been. “It’s too bad,” he growled to himself, “that a fellow can’t be left alone by his own sister ; nor did the fact that this indignity had been inflicted on him

under Robur's roof tend to diminish his chagrin. Arnold had certainly smiled when Grace retailed the thing—whatever it was—to him, and that was enough for Frank. He did not see that his host restrained the risible impulse as soon as it was felt. His sister's open amusement mattered comparatively little to him, but it was not so easy to forget that he had made sport for his great enemy. It was the last straw. "I'll teach him to laugh at me," he muttered between his clenched teeth.

The dishes, lightened of their flaming burdens of plum-pudding, had been removed, and the conversation began to die down as every man filled his neighbour's glass, and then his own. Arnold looked down the table at Mrs. Marchpane, who seemed to be bursting with the consciousness that something unexpected was going to happen.

"What is it?" he whispered to Grace Dalton; "you all seem to be in the secret but me." Before she could answer there arose a deafening clatter of knives and forks, led off by a burly, red-faced man who sat near the bailiff at the other end of the table, and was known to most of the company as Farmer Bunting, the principal tenant on the Oakleigh estate. Hereupon Gibbins rose with much solemnity, and grasping the handle of a shining pewter mug affectionately, bowed a great many times, and announced that

the present seemed to him no unseasonable opportunity for making a speech. He was not allowed to get under weigh, however, till the appropriateness of the remark had been endorsed by a fresh salvo of applause: thus fortified he was able to start off at last under the most favourable auspices.

“Ladies and gentlemen, friends all; I rises confidential-like to propose a bit of a toast, which I know as you all wish me to do, and havin’ bin told as it’s the c’rect thing, and no unrespect about it.” Here the speaker wiped the perspiration from his brow, and appeared to derive much consolation from the bow on the top of Mrs. Marchpane’s cap, as he continued to contemplate it fixedly throughout the rest of his brief harangue.

“This ’ere toast as I’m agoin’ to propose is your ’ealth, Mr. Robur, sir; and what I say is that if there’s any truth in the saying ‘like master, like man,’ p’raps your bein’ happy and livin’ prosp’rous will effeck me so as I shall do ditto, so to speak. (Cheers and laughter.) Well, gents,—not forgetting your good ladies—so far everythink has bin going on straight betwixt me and my master, there ain’t bin no cross porpwasses atween us. We ain’t lost anythink by it, either, for all he is free-handed, like his good father afore him. The accounts square

off as good as usual, though some of his friends here to-night hev got to thank him for reducin' of their rents. (Cheers). Then the live stock is a-flourishin'; in the words of the poet, which some on us may remember—

'On the rampient hills my father feeds his flocks;
Take them for all in all, we ne'er shall look upon their likes agin.'

"Yes, yes, W. Bunting, I hears you, and I'm a comin' to the tenants as fast as I can go." The red-faced man before-mentioned allowed himself to be mollified by this reassurance, and desisted from certain frantic efforts to attract the orator's attention, which seemed likely, if kept up much longer, to terminate in a broken blood-vessel. Mr. Gibbins continued:—

"The tenants, sir, wishes me to say as they is deeply aware of all wot they owes you,—both pecoonarily and otherwise (a laugh),—and 'opes they may be able after a spell to make up to you bit by bit all wot you hev lost. They has bin treated 'andsome, and they knows it. (Great applause.) Charity allus has, and allus will, begin at home; rest upon me for that. Not as I means any offence to you, Mr. Armitage, sir, and I don't say it ends at home. I ain't for advisin' no one to stay away from them charity sermons for the Profligation o' the Gospel in foreign parks which most of us has heard now and again up at the church yonder. Not a bit

on it; all I means to say is, Give my master credit for the best hintentions, allus rememberin' there is a brighter side to everythink, and drink to his success in carryin' of 'em out." (Loud cheers.)

The toast was drunk with great enthusiasm, none of the time-honoured institutions which form the accessories on such an occasion being omitted, and the indefatigable Bunting proved the sound condition of his pulmonary system by keeping up with stentorian energy the choice refrain in which the virtues of the toasted individual are summed up by the emphatic declaration that he is a "jolly good fellow."

Arnold thanked them all in a few simple words for the kind way in which they had received his hospitality, and then every one set to work, and the hall was soon converted from a feasting into a dancing room.

The band, composed exclusively of local talent, had just struck up, Mr. Hewitt was sitting against the wall with his shoes off, cooling his stockinged feet preparatory to indulging, as he informed his good lady, in a "'ealthful 'op," and the host was stepping off with Grace Dalton, when—to adopt a convenient newspaper phrase, more remarkable for usefulness than literary elegance—our report left.

CHAPTER V.

“ ODS PISTOLS AND BULLETS.”

“ Hates any man the thing he would not kill ? ”

The Merchant of Venice.

GRACE DALTON was becoming very anxious about her brother. Hitherto his life had been one long Devil's Sabbath, and the scrupulous way in which he had observed the ordinance, “ in it thou shalt do no manner of good,” was little short of pharisaical. As he grew older, however, his method of conducting himself gave more pressing reasons for alarm than had been the case while he was still a school-boy, and his friends could feel that there was plenty of time for the development of that consciousness of responsibility which is conventionally associated with the attainment by a human being of “ years of discretion.” But this comfortable expectation seemed fated to turn out a delusion in Frank's case as year was added to year, leaving him nothing to show for the discretion which never came but a few sorry instincts, a little private oligarchy of

spoiled tyrants with nothing to do but heap burdens on their ignoble slave.

The causes he assigned for the prolongation of his visits to Copesbury of late had never quite satisfied Grace ; on the last occasion, when he had been introduced to Captain Mack, her leading questions on his return had aggravated him out of all patience, and he had sulkily refused to satisfy her “beastly bothering.” It was no use to confide her doubts to her father and mother ; she was as desirous as Frank himself to avoid a family disturbance—a “shine,” as he would more forcibly have expressed it. As for Mrs. Dalton, she had such a morbid horror of worry that nothing would induce her to look a difficulty in the face if she could possibly avoid the duty. Grace fully understood the risk of trying to force her to do so, having often before experienced disagreeable effects from her mother’s wonderful knack of foisting the responsibility of deciding a question upon others, the right of criticism afterwards always being reserved for the good lady’s own peculiar exercise.

There was only one person who might be able to help her ; and Grace looked forward to Arnold’s return from Burnport with all the eagerness of a dependent nature relying upon the succour of a trusty friend. She would have liked to ask his advice by letter, for suspense troubled her, and

immediate relief was what she most needed. A short time back she would not have hesitated to adopt that course, but now something kept her from it, hinting that it was better to wait than to commit herself. She hesitated, then gave up the idea, and finally fixed her hopes upon the party which was to be given on Christmas Day at Oakleigh. There would be plenty of opportunity then, she thought, of speaking to Arnold, and meanwhile it was scarcely probable that her brother could come to any fresh harm.

The relation that existed between Grace and Arnold was not an uncommon one. The intimacy between them had never been broken, except by absence, and it always continued in a perfectly natural and spontaneous fashion whenever they met. On his side there was a warm feeling of friendship, not unmingled at times with a certain amount of admiration for her delicate tact and amiability; but though the charms of her exterior were not lost upon him, they never affected him at all deeply. He never even thought himself in love with her, nor did he imagine for a moment that the same could not be said of her. Had he been disturbed by any opposite hallucination of self-conceit, he would certainly have made a great mistake. And yet—such is the intricacy of a woman's capricious fancy—she had allowed herself, mainly upon the half-uttered

suggestions of others, to unconsciously harbour the notion that they were only waiting for some unknown signal to fall into each other's arms. There was some fatality about it, she supposed ; for she only felt that liking for Arnold which any healthy-minded girl would have for a man with whom she had grown up, and who always treated her as a favourite sister. But, however it came about, the mention of his name, or anything connected with him, was now beginning to call up a new association along with the old ones, and she experienced something of the pride of ownership.

Perhaps Arnold himself would not have credited the tenacity with which the germ of this mischievous prognostication held its own, and rapidly developed, in Grace's otherwise sane little head. She had been unsuccessful in her first attempt to utterly uproot the thought of such a contingency, and it had spread out one long tendril after another till it had all the appearance of a thriving probability. After all, the circumstances of the two seemed to warrant the conclusion at which one of them was automatically arriving. Most of Arnold's acquaintances, indeed, had ceased to speculate about his matrimonial prospects, considering the matter to be virtually settled. There was, therefore, abundant excuse for Grace to tacitly follow the direction

towards which her destiny seemed to be insensibly tending. Her disposition was not one to fight against the resistless force of circumstances ; conformity had always been to her the easier part to play. Providence must have intended them for each other, and she supposed it would be the happiest thing for both of them. It was stupid of her not to think of it before. Anyhow, she would try what came of familiarising herself with the prospect, even though it did look just a little doubtful, and endeavour not to disappoint her relations when the time came.

The Christmas party had two important and unforeseen results. Grace learned that her castles were constructed of nothing more substantial than air, and determined to give up the intention of ever actually tenanting them. Arnold's reference to Ursula Lorton settled that ; the manner in which he spoke of her was decisive to one who knew him as well as Grace did. At present she hardly knew whether to laugh or be disappointed. She could have stamped with vexation at having so very nearly made a terrible blunder through listening to the officious gossip of outsiders. She little knew what her brother was about, or she might have thought that an abnormal capacity for blundering ran in the family. The gossips of the neighbourhood had been less careful to conceal their plans for Grace's

future welfare from Frank than from the young lady herself. Nothing but the very plainest evidence to the contrary would have convinced him that her heart was not set on the object of his absurd hatred, and his perception, sluggish as it was in other matters, was sharp enough to find startling confirmation of his opinion in the most trivial occurrences. If he was on the watch for a good pretext for quarrelling with Arnold, he could scarcely have discovered anything better to his purpose than Grace's demeanour during the last few weeks before Christmas. He almost persuaded himself that he was really actuated by concern for her happiness in twisting everything she did or said into agreement with his prejudices.

When she was silent and thoughtful he assumed that she was pining away for love of his enemy. When she talked it was forced ; she only pretended not to care for fear of the just vengeance which her magnanimous champion might be driven to wreak on the traitor ; and so forth. It is easy to put two and two together in such a manner as to make five, or anything rather than four, when we have a strong enough reason for doing so. Frank, to do him justice, never attributed Grace's depression to his own shortcomings ; there was nothing of that sort in the branch of literature which he favoured ; the paltry heroes who had professed his rubbishy

code of 'honour' before him were always the victims of other people's failings. Carrying out this same rôle of being his sister's protector, he had caused her considerable annoyance at the party by continually putting himself in her way.

"For goodness' sake, Frank, don't keep getting under my feet so." That was how she rewarded his services. But the call of duty was imperative, and the chivalrous youth scorned to play into the deceiver's hands by humouring poor Grace's weak request. Nothing passed between Grace and Arnold, therefore, on the question of Frank's prospects, at the party. That misunderstood individual thought his sister extremely ungrateful for his liberal patronage, and Grace was too much incensed at his galling supervision to say a word to him all the way home.

"It's too bad," she said to herself; "I had so looked forward to that talk with Arnold; I'm sure he would have made me feel more hopeful about the poor dear boy." Then she reflected that her imaginary reason against writing was now removed, and resolved to avail herself at once of the circumstance.

But if Grace was impetuous, and eager to strike while the iron was hot, Frank was at least her match in this respect, for his haste was unrestrained by that element of prudence which

has an influence on the calculations of most women, even when they are taken by surprise.

The Christmas festivities were hardly over when Mr. Dalton announced one morning that he would have to break into his repose by going over to Copesbury for the day.

“It’s just some stupid little business that anybody could do,” he remarked somewhat testily; “but there’s nobody I can send just now, and I suppose I must e’en go myself; that’s the long and the short of it.”

“Let me go,” said Frank hurriedly. “I don’t mind going a bit, and I could do what you want, couldn’t I?”

“Humph,” ejaculated his father, raising his eyebrows in some surprise, “is Frank also among the useful members of society? Well, it’s something new and original, at all events.”

The young scapegrace achieved a double end by this impromptu manœuvre; he gave his parent immense gratification, and had a good excuse for again taking his station, a docile pupil, at the ill-shod feet of that formidable corruptor of youth, Mr. Rock. The elder Dalton, however, augured nothing but good from Frank’s unwonted readiness to oblige; it was the old episode of the Prodigal Son in little, and there was no elder brother to interfere, and spoil things. Grace apparently paid no attention; at least she did

not say anything, and the prodigal started off, armed with his instructions.

The business was rapidly concluded, and Frank turned his steps jubilantly in the direction of the Cope-house. He met with an affectionate reception from his erudite guide, philosopher, and friend.

“You’re come just in time to say good-bye to the Captain,” said Hiram, as he led the way upstairs. “He leaves my humble roof to-morrow for the Continent, finding the climate too cold, and certain other matters too hot for his delicate constitution here at home at this jovial season of the year. We heard about your grand kick-up t’other night at the aristocratic mansion of a certain magnate. Saw it in the *Courier*, you know. Ah, well; ‘Christmas comes but once a-year,’ and when it does come round it generally brings nuts and oranges, and peace and goodwill, and all that sort of thing, in its wake, don’t it, my boy?”

This last observation was addressed to Captain Mack, on whom the speaker emerged, as he made it, through the open door at the top of the stairs.

“It’s a pity it don’t bring quite enough of those precious articles to go all round,” responded the warrior gloomily. “As for the peace and good-will, I can spare them,” he added; “give

me the nuts and oranges. But I haven't seen too many of them, even, in this shop.”

“What a man it is for creature comforts,” sighed Mr. Rock, motioning Frank to a chair. “Now this young gent here ain't of your way of thinking, I'll be bound. He's made his peace with his enemies, and is now in the enjoyment of a quiet mind as well as a full stomach, or I'm no judge of a cheerful countenance.”

The subject of this ill-timed compliment did not appear to be quite so pleased with it as the bookseller doubtless intended him to be. He wriggled uneasily on his chair, and blurted out, “I can't help what I look like, can I? Perhaps you think I've forgiven A. R. because I went to his party that night; well, you're out there, for I hate him worse than ever I did before. Perhaps you think I'm going to knock under to him, and let him off what he deserves; you're wrong there, too. See here; I bought this for him as I was coming along, and I know how to manage the tool, as he'll know to his cost before many more days are over.” As he spoke he drew out of a small hand-bag a rather antiquated-looking pistol, and held it out for inspection.

“There's powder and shot there,” he went on, pointing to the bag, “as much as he's worth. I wasn't going to spend too much coin over it,

as I only want it for just one shot, you know, and then I shall throw the thing away."

"H'm, it's rather old-fashioned, but it'll do for that," said Captain Mack, examining the weapon. "I wonder what sort of work it has been used for before. Aimed low it might be effective enough on —— some sorts of game. Ah, it's a delightful pastime. I never did very much in that way myself; but the little I have seen of it makes me quite anxious to take to it again as soon as anyone is obliging enough to offer me a chance. It wasn't much in fashion in Spain, and elsewhere on the Continent, the scenes of most of my sporting experiences. Steel was always held in higher estimation than lead there. We always carved our game. It was slower, perhaps, but more amusing! oh! decidedly more amusing." The Captain showed his teeth in a wolfish smile. "But no doubt you, as a beginner, are quite right in your choice," he added, for it would not do to discourage his juvenile follower. Pique was the instrument by which the Captain hoped to gain his end, and he could not have selected a method better adapted for imposing on his dupe. For it is not a little noteworthy how many hot-headed and intemperate persons have rushed upon ruin at the bidding of this strange impulse. People have committed every crime in the decalogue for

pique, and are perpetually relinquishing all sorts of dear and worthy objects of their loving ambition for the sake of wilfully blighting their own fortunes. To such natures as Frank Dalton's it seems sometimes as though the tempter had but to whisper the magic charm, “Spite yourself,” and they must leave their all, and follow him to the nethermost hell of remorse.

“Ah, Mack, Mack, what a life you've led! It ain't as though you had confined your passion for bagging game to the more warlike sex, either, my sportsman,” and Mr. Rock, highly delighted with this delicate reference to his friend's reputation as a lady-killer, burst into one of his excruciating chuckles.

“So you think of turning your hand to the noble art of self-defence, eh?” said the captain.

Frank acknowledged the compliment implied in this euphemistic description of his intentions. A captious observer might have thought these preliminaries to have been of an offensive rather than a defensive character; but that was a detail.

The peaceful vendor of literature was, however, more easily satisfied. Turning to his colleague with a triumphant air, he exclaimed, “What did I tell you? Didn't I promise to prove to you there was pluck outside the service as well as in it? Didn't I tell you there was a young gent living not a hundred miles from this emporium

who had so much spirit corked up inside of him that it was more than the bottle could do to hold it? Didn't I——”

“Don't trouble to repeat it,” interrupted the object of this impassioned appeal. “I've no doubt you've said so dozens of times already, but you won't change my conviction that pluck is gone, exploded—I don't care whether in or out of the service; in short, it's a lost art. Why, the new-fangled improvements in these handy little contrivances for bringing down your game at a long range show that.” So saying, he handed the weapon back to its owner, who received it with a rather crestfallen appearance. “Not that I'm bigoted in my opinion,” continued the Captain in the tone of one whose impartiality towards his undeserving fellow-creatures was not to be disturbed by their sad degeneracy; “show me the man who can wipe off an old score neatly, and I'm his friend, no matter who he is, or how he managed the business. But one doesn't come across too many of one's brothers-in-arms in a lifetime,” he added, relapsing into his despondent mood.

“Sanguinary monster!” cried Mr. Rock gaily; “he's prejudiced against firearms because they don't shed enough blood for him. But just see how much more humane a bullet is than a blade, you rogue, besides being quieter and more

effective. It's a development of our civilisation, that's what it is. You and I are getting behind the times, my boy ; we must leave our youngers and betters to choose for themselves, you know.”

“ Oh, if you only want to punish your enemy, and not kill him outright, I should advise you to use a pistol by all means,” replied Mack, resting his feet on the mantelpiece, and puffing away at a cheroot, out of which he seemed to “suck no small advantage.”

“ Well, that's all I want to do at present,” said Frank, “ though, if he goes on, there's no knowing what I mayn't be driven to. The things I've been made to stand from that fellow are about enough to turn a man crazy, you know. Why, he actually takes upon himself to advise my people what to do with me, and I can't stand that. I know why he's doing it too ; he thinks he can have it all his own way in one of his secret plans if I'm got rid of. But he'll find out his mistake, 'cos I'm not going to take myself off just to please him, and let other people be insulted by him, even though they are so sweet on the brute. Oh, don't I hate him ; that's all.”

Neither of the auditors of this excited outburst had any reason to doubt the genuineness of the sentiment with which it concluded. Their comments were few but expressive, and referred—at

least, so Frank understood them—merely to the atrocious behaviour of the individual whose identity had been concealed from them with such masterly fidelity.

“Low,” murmured Mr. Rock.

“Bad form,” echoed his colleague.

“I knew you would say that,” cried the novice, springing up to shake hands with both of them. “I knew you wouldn’t stand by, and see a fellow wronged without budging an inch to help him on a bit. Now then, Captain Mack, Father Hiram, what’s your advice?” He looked alternately from one to the other as he spoke, scrutinising their expressive features with shifty and doubtful eyes, impatient for the smallest suggestion of encouragement.

“Hist,” ejaculated the bookseller, raising his hand, “I think some one is asking for me downstairs,” and he stole out of the room, bidding them go on with their conversation, and not wait for him to return.

“It ill becomes me to give an opinion to a young man of spirit like yourself,” began the Captain, acting immediately upon Mr. Rock’s permission to proceed without him. “But, if you will have it, I should say that you could not do better than go on as you are doing now; in which admirable and gallant course you have my most cordial wishes for your success.”

Frank thanked him for his disinterested sympathy, and they shook hands solemnly once more.

“Revenge is not a thing one can afford to delay much,” Mack went on, lolling with his head over the back of his chair, in which attitude he employed the pauses in blowing rings of smoke up towards the ceiling. “Of course no one but a fool would rush it ; but then no one but a fool would wait till he cooled down, and then perhaps tamely submit, and give up the notion altogether. That’s what I call shirking one’s responsibilities.”

Frank assented eagerly. “I expect he’ll give me heaps of opportunities,” he said, “and I shall just stick to him till I find one that’ll do.”

“Spoken like a man of spirit,” was the admiring response to this determined manifesto. “That’s exactly what you ought to do ; stick to him like glue, and you’re sure of an early chance of doing the trick in the prettiest way possible. I can see you won’t have to wait long for your promotion among the ranks of men of honour, Mr. Dalton. Few of us have been able to make a start towards that splendid ambition so early as you are doing. You’re fortunate, sir. Why, I’ve known many cases where the suspense before revenge could be tasted has spoiled the best years in a man’s life. Ah, those slow revenges ! they take it out of one, I can tell you.”

"I've been reading about that sort of thing lately," said Frank, blushing crimson. "It was about a woman, you know. The book said that women were best at slow revenges, and all that sort of thing. But I don't believe it, do you? No woman I ever met had the spirit to drown a kitten."

"Oh, that's all put on for show," replied the Captain, smiling pleasantly. "It's always a point of honour with a woman to pretend she's got no spirit at all, but you don't catch them forgetting to revenge themselves, no matter how long they have to wait for it. The slowest revenge—and in some ways the best—I ever came across in my experience was taken by a woman on a man. She was in love with another man, and this first fellow, who was desperately smitten with her, hadn't a chance. Well, he knew she hated him, his friends were always telling him so; but he was a fool, and he went and spread a lot of lies about her which had the effect finally of choking off the other man, her real flame."

The Captain paused, and blew two or three stupendous rings. "I could put out a candle with any one of those," he remarked, proudly. This was too much for Frank's patience; "please go on, Captain," he implored.

"I beg your pardon," said that amiable person; "your society somehow makes me lose myself."

The lady's revenge is what you want to hear. Just so. What do you think she did?"

"Married the man she wanted to injure, I should suppose," said Mr. Rock, who had joined them unobserved by his hopeful pupil.

"You're right, my friend; that's what she did. Ha, ha, ha! But you needn't scoff at it, friend Hiram; it was no laughing matter for him, I can assure you."

"Well, it's not what I should call an uncommon thing for a woman to revenge herself on a man by marrying him," observed Mr. Rock. "I might have been served that way myself once, if my weather eye hadn't been precious wide open."

"I congratulate you on your escape," said the Captain ironically; "I can almost feel for her at having missed such a treat. But that's not the same thing," he continued; "I don't suppose your would-be tormentor had any special grudge against you to drive her to take the desperate step. In fact, I will pay you the compliment of supposing that she must have been attracted by your engaging manners and appearance rather than repelled; it's no good attempting to understand the mystery of female infatuation, you know. In the case I'm speaking of, however, there was nothing of that sort. The loathing that generally follows wedlock came before it instead, and drove my heroine to endure the

company of her greatest enemy in order that she might have him safe in her clutches, and tear his heart to pieces with slow tortures. She didn't care a jot what became of herself as long as she could ensure a death of lingering agony for him. She ruined her own fortune as well as his to accomplish this. The plans she invented to make him miserable were absolutely perfect in their ingenuity. For a long time she pretended to be melancholy mad, and wouldn't speak a word to him. That was more congenial work than most of her other tricks. The hardest part she had to play was when she would pretend to be almost kind to the unlucky devil, so as to make him feel all the more keenly the contrast between the marriage he had sacrificed everything to win, and that marriage as it had actually turned out. She was not a strong woman in health, and she was older than he was ; but there was one thing which kept her alive through it all, the thought that she must see the end of him before she died. And so she did, gentlemen. She had the pleasure of whispering curses into his ear as he lay dying in the foulest cellar that could be found for the purpose ; and she drank the water which a thoughtless neighbour had brought for him before his very eyes. They dragged her away from his carcase to a mad-house, but she was satisfied. She couldn't have

laid out her time and money better, she said. It was a glorious revenge. Some day I shall write a book about it in the latest realistic style.”

The bookseller rubbed his hands. “It’s worth thinking about,” he said; “I’ll help you to produce it, my boy, and we’ll share the profits.”

“Perhaps it’s hardly necessary to add that the heroine of that romance was a French woman,” remarked the Captain; “no one else can work in artistic accessories with such humour.”

“I dare say not,” responded Mr. Rock; “but don’t you despair. We never know what we can do till we try, eh, Mr. Dalton, sir?”

That gentleman, however, was prevented by excitement from replying coherently. “You shall hear all about it soon,” he stammered; “a man’s not to be beaten by a woman, you know.”

“I hope we shall meet again before long, then, under happier circumstances than the present,” said the Captain, rising as Frank took his bag with trembling fingers, and fumbled with the lock. “We expect a great deal from you, sir; and as soon as I find a suitable resting-place abroad I shall write at once to our friend here for information about you.”

Hiram accompanied his “young patron,” as he now insisted upon addressing Frank, to the shop-door, and bestowed an unctuous benediction upon him before parting. “When you next

darken these humble doors, sir," said he, "may it be with the flush of victory on your face. What a reception we shall do our modest best to provide for you!" Frank turned the corner,—he was across the Rubicon now,—and his preceptor retraced his steps, superabundantly satisfied with his own and his partner's share in the transaction.

"The best stroke of business we have ever done together," he mused. "Does the fool really think he's only going to maim his man with that young cannon? If he hits him, ten to one he kills him, and this neighbourhood may prepare to turn out for a fashionable funeral in another week with tolerable certainty, I think. It'll be a good joke if I'm called to serve on the jury that convicts Master Frank Dalton at the next Assizes."

That evening saw the finishing-touches put to the business of the firm before its temporary dissolution on the morrow.

CHAPTER VI.

ARMITAGE.

“Love’s very pain is sweet ;
But its reward is in the world divine,
Which if not here, it builds beyond the grave.”

Shelley.

“I HAVE come for ghostly counsel, Armitage,” said Robur, entering his friend’s study at Burfield vicarage one evening soon after Christmas.

The clergyman raised his eyebrows.

“Perhaps you didn’t expect me to make you my father confessor,” continued Robur, smiling at the other’s slight gesture, “but the fact is I’ve got the clog round my neck too, like the rest of humanity. Why were the creatures of the Garden of Eden made male and female—man especially ? If there had been only one sex—who knows ? We might not have been lamenting the Fall to-day, or yearn in vain to be free and self-sufficient.”

The speaker had thrown himself into a settle by the fire, and was leaning forward, his eyes on

the hissing copper kettle, and his hands spread out to catch the warmth.

Armitage was a little taken aback by the impulsive way in which his visitor had unbosomed himself. He was accustomed to regard Arnold's temperament as an unusually judicial one, and was firmly persuaded that a certain radical orthodoxy which he thought he saw in the young man's character would one day assert itself in no half-hearted fashion. Besides, he was of a reserved nature himself, and not much used to confidences of this description.

"You can't get rid of the interdependence of the sexes, Robur," he said, smiling. "But perhaps you are merely making use of me as a *corpus vile* on which to test the venom of your journalistic quill before you offer it to be quaffed as a healing nostrum by the general reader."

Arnold laughed in his turn.

"Nothing of the sort, my dear fellow. I haven't sent anything to the *Tuba* for an age, and don't mean to do so again for another. To tell you the truth, now, I should say that your own style was considerably more adapted to the taste of that influential journal's public than mine. One good turn deserves another, you know."

"Come, I don't quite deserve this severity," returned Armitage good-humouredly, walking

across the room to ring for coffee. "I must own I didn't think you could be quite sincere, though," he added, as he reseated himself opposite his guest.

"Now, Armitage! I may have thoughtlessly tampered with my moral sense by writing once or twice for a newspaper, but do you suppose that I don't still draw the line at speaking a lie?"

"My dear Robur, you are in a captious frame of mind. Please do not expect me to mean all I say, if I said that."

"What an admission for a ghostly counsellor to make!" quibbled Arnold, as he took a cup of coffee from the tray which had just been brought in. "Well, I accept your apology, and ask leave to make a personal explanation, as my lords of the Treasury bench say."

He inserted the poker meditatively between the bars of the grate, and went on:

"I always thought I should hate a manly woman, but I've found one lately, and I can't tell you how much I like her: she has made me ambitious to be a womanly man."

"Spiritually hermaphrodite, as it were," said Armitage; "well?"

"Yes; I don't think men and women ought to be so mutually dependent. Is such dependence the 'perfect law of liberty' most people suppose it to be?"

Armitage considered for a moment, and then said reflectively :

“That turns on what their idea of the dependence is. I agree with you that no one individual ought to fix his affections so completely upon another individual as to feel that life would be a blank without that other. A love which narrows instead of enlarging the heart that feels it is certainly an unblest emotion in my opinion. At the same time, I hold that men and women, taken in the mass, are just as necessarily dependent on each other for reciprocal spiritual offices as for the physical ones which keep up society.”

“And yet,” mused Arnold, “how many people of those one meets, and has dealings with, ever dream of putting any but the most poverty-stricken interpretation on that dependence : love means nothing more to most of them than infatuation.”

“Yes,” said Armitage, folding his arms, “it often means little enough beyond that, to begin with. But you must not forget what a depth of capacity there is in the unworthiest devotion. Why, the police reports teem with evidence of the monstrous lengths to which people allow themselves to be carried for the sake of despicable and even puerile ends. After all, men may be infatuated with worse things than beauty

of exterior: even those fading corporeal charms are a more worthy object of devotion than wine or money-bags."

"You don't think love is selfish, then?"

"It is, no doubt, at first. The truest lover is as selfish as the basest when his eyes first rest upon that gracious form whose presence—nay, whose memory—can stir so sweet a tumult in his soul as nothing but undisturbed communing with its unconscious cause can quell. That is the selfish mistake, if you will, that every lover must plead guilty to having committed in the earliest stage of his love. But it is not a mistake that the reason, with its infinite shortcomings, can complain of, and a man need never regret having trusted his heart in such a case. When was the reason ever known to assail the decisions of a pure heart? Unselfishness is only enlightened selfishness, and our progress from the one habit of mind to the other begins with human love, till we transcend the widening circle of created things, and end with the divine."

There was a pause. Arnold felt, as Joanna Blunsden had made him feel before, the unearthly beauty of a devotion such as that which Armitage painted, a devotion which could spread wings for itself, and bear aloft its load of care in strong eagle-flights, distancing earth's terrible attractive force, while every stroke lessened the

burden's weight. And all this without the aid of visible, concrete sustenance ! It was a hard saying.

Armitage was the first to break the silence.

"A love which schools us to sacrifice even the very objects of our earthly affection for that which they symbolise cannot be called selfish, Robur," he said quietly. Arnold's perplexity troubled him, and he would have given much to know the precise nature of his friend's difficulty.

"I suppose it's all true : the best lover, I suppose, must be he who needs the schooling of symbols least, and arrives at his ultimate destination, the divine ideal of human love, by the shortest route."

Armitage could not help being rather amused by the speaker's hopeless tone.

"I don't know why you should call him the best lover," he said with a smile ; "I suppose he is the happiest. But he may have possessed advantages of temperament, or what not ; and no credit can be claimed for that. I shouldn't wonder if he got more blamed than praised, though ; people would probably call him hard and unsympathetic."

Arnold nodded.

"The majority can't be brought to take in more than a few individuals, which was what we started from, I believe. However, you needn't

trouble about it for my sake. None will have much reason to call me hard and unsympathetic—on those grounds, at any rate; I'm afraid there's very little chance of my coming forward as a candidate for that sort of persecution."

"Well, it is for that majority that marriage may be said to be, humanly speaking, a necessity, and so far we are in accord," replied the clergyman. "Of course you understand that I assume the lover's aim to be a single one, as I believe in most cases it actually is. If figures show the capacity for loving persons to be a commoner constitution of mind than the 'missionary spirit' which cannot be appeased with any less comprehensive devotion than enthusiasm for a community, figures do not prove anything farther. They do not prove, for instance, that a man who is capable of this enthusiasm is therefore better than one who requires something more tangible for his affection to lay hold of, but only that his circumstances are better."

"It comes to the same thing," said Robur.

"I am not so sure of that. Sometimes I think the slower advance through that very mediate infatuation for an individual which you affect to despise is the surer way too, after all. Other people talk a great deal, but do they really feel as much as the simple couples whose married lives have been spent in practically learning to

regard the interest of others as identical with their own? Can we who have never known wife or child expect to compound satisfactorily for this apprenticeship, this prelude to absolute and perfect love?"

"Then is marriage become the only way of salvation," cried Arnold warmly. "Come, my dear Armitage, too much heart-searching is making you morbid. But this diffidence is absurd. No; for really irreclaimable spinsters and bachelors commend me to the married ones!"

"You look quite pleased with yourself after flinging that stone," said Armitage; "to think that I should have lived to hear myself reproached by you for being morbid! Look out for the glass, my friend. As for your married spinsters and bachelors, I know them well. But what can you expect? There are always some fools who can placidly waste even the most obvious opportunities. Besides, marriage is in many cases no more the necessary than it ought to be the sole consummation of love as we agree that it is felt by the majority. 'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.'

"Even in the circle of the fixed stars Dante cannot take his eyes off the face of Beatrice. The mystical splendour of the Rose and Lilies of

Christ's garden are unheeded by him, and possess no attraction comparable to his lady's smile. But it is her voice, her encouragement, that recalls him to his duty. So it was with 'the wan sweet maiden' who 'laid her mind on' Galahad in the story, and so it is whenever love breaks down all barriers between two faithful hearts."

"There must be many lovers whose union is destined never to go further than betrothal; all sorts of circumstances may stand in the way, and prevent it. And even supposing that the lovers could have foreseen that this must be the end of their union,—that it must stop short with a plighted troth never to be fulfilled,—as might be said in the world,—who will say that they were wrong to accept the opportunity of such sweet intercourse as was possible for them, without waiting for the superfluous approval of parents, and kinsfolk, and friends? Physical union, I grant you, may not be incurred without a good prospect of being able to honourably meet the responsibility it brings. But when a man and maid are sincerely in love with each other, let them give up sordid thoughts. No one should be so base as to hint that they ought to relinquish the greatest boon life can offer for the sake of some wretched fear that they can never be married. Prospects! I should like to know how far the fairest bank-balance would compensate

for even the momentary loss of that potent talisman."

"I wish you would expand your views on the subject, and publish them in a pamphlet addressed to the parents and guardians of Great Britain," laughed Arnold; "there would be less need for their circulation in Ireland, I suspect; they are hardly worldly-wise enough over there."

He had never seen his friend interest himself in any topic with such ardour before. On professedly religious subjects Armitage always maintained great self-command. Perhaps he counted on a greater measure of Robur's sympathy than usual on the present occasion.

"I think you are right, though," continued the clergyman's visitor, becoming serious again. "We don't hear nearly enough of engagements that have been, as people say, broken off. To see any connexion between a man's purse and such a companionship in its highest form is worse than superstitious. But, surely, the doctrine is not universally digestible. It will not do to encourage a distaste for thrift, and the sober domestic graces, in people who enter upon an engagement only because it is an orthodox and respectable preface to marriage. Such persons desire a formal recognition of their union rather than that union itself, and while we wish them joy of their exceedingly moderate

ambition we ought not to forget how much worse their position might be if they were to rush upon their fate without any regard to the baser sort of prudence which is adapted to their understanding."

"But I don't believe in having one doctrine for the generality of people, and a different one for private use among the enlightened few," objected Armitage.

"Neither do I; but you must be aware that however fervently we may each profess the same doctrine, the construction we put upon it varies with our private idiosyncrasies and predilections, so that it can sometimes scarcely be recognised as the same at all. Most men are persuaded of the necessity of religion, but their manifestation of the impulse to worship something takes strangely divergent forms. One man immures himself in a cloister, another tramps along in the middle of a crowd, screaming himself hoarse to the noisy strains of a brass band. One man cannot do without the presence of a congregation of worshippers like himself, another cannot do with them. It's no use grumbling because we can none of us agree with each other. The philosopher sees the radical harmony which underlies all our surface eccentricities, and is not surprised to find that individual differences in logical capacity lead us to draw grotesquely

various conclusions from the same collection of dogmas. The fact is, my dear Armitage, there is no end to the complications that may result from the unequal balance of heart and brain in any one of us. Sometimes one preponderates, sometimes the other, and you can never calculate with safety exactly where the resultant of the two forces will fall in any given case."

Armitage clapped his hands.

"Bravo!" he cried; "you've let the cat out of the bag at last. I wasn't quite sure before what the difference between us really was. You believe in some supposed antagonism, then, between the ends which the reason proposes to us, and those which appear desirable we know not how or why, knowing only that they stir in us a passionate longing for their attainment?"

"Yes, I most certainly do," replied Arnold stoutly.

"I am sorry to hear it," said his friend, "for I will not disguise from you that I consider it my agreeable duty to try and disabuse you of this chimera."

"You have my best wishes for your success, for there is nothing more enjoyable than to hold a comfortable conviction. Pray do your best; I shall not object to the longest incantations you can think of," and Arnold settled himself in his

chair with the air of a man who is determined to give his opponent a fair chance.

“Well, now, just to begin with, I should like to ask you how you reconcile this insurmountable antagonism, as you consider it, with what you said just now about a radical harmony under the apparent confusion of things being perceptible to the philosopher, by whom, I presume, you meant yourself.”

Robur was charmed with the spirit of this attack.

“What a coat of mail you have got peeping out under your peaceable black cloth, Armitage,” said he; “in the middle ages they would have made a capital fighting bishop of you. But it really is not the least use proceeding with our discussion if you insist upon taking me to task for my inconsistency. You must therefore consider yourself sufficiently answered when I inform you that my brain is at the mercy of my heart in the present instance. I am not an altogether unnatural monster, you know, and Nature’s estimation of consistency may be compared to the lively prejudice which she is said to entertain against something only a shade worse,—a vacuum, namely.”

Armitage laughed; “I remember something of a conversation we had not long since with your friend Paston,” he observed. “Then, if I mistake

not, you were at great pains to uphold the supremacy of the intellect."

"I believe I did maintain the necessity of examining the grounds of one's beliefs," replied the other; "and though I may be induced to modify the position I held, I have no intention of evacuating it altogether."

"Perhaps not,—though, for my own part, I believe you are mistaken. But, at any rate, you are beginning to feel the reaction, to acknowledge that there are some mysteries which elude probing, and yet must be hugged closer than all the lore of fluid phenomena and deciduous facts. The sand is shifting under your feet, and you eye the sheltering rock a little nervously. Why has it endured, but to raise its silent testimony against your unbelief in the survival of the fittest?"

"Do you ask me not to exercise my reason, except upon certain subjects?" Arnold spoke eagerly. "Finite and defective as it may be, it is the one staff in our hands to support us in our search for Truth. Would you have us throw it away when we come to an especially difficult part of the journey, and then, through want of practice, grow clumsy in wielding it at all?"

Armitage did not hesitate. "No," he said; "use your staff to the full, but do not expect too much from it. If we are cripples we have at

least got our crutches—two of them—and why you should persevere in availing yourself of only one is more than I can understand.”

“Because the other one is more of a hindrance than a help,” was the reply; “it is always catching in the only staff we can depend upon, or else getting between one’s legs, and tripping one up. So we prefer to strap it up out of sight behind our backs.”

“Don’t stake too much on your analogy, my dear Robur. Let me make our difference clear. Each of us, in common with the rest of mankind, has been provided with two guides, and it is for us to choose which of them we will follow. That is your view. We cannot follow both of them, you assume, and so we must select for ourselves the one whose dictates are least likely to clash with our peculiar tastes. More than that, you have hinted that, though a man may decide to follow in most cases only the impulse which he receives from one particular source, yet there may be times and occasions when the behests of the rejected leader must be obeyed. You speak of consulting your reason as your general practice; but I am not very much surprised to hear that you have lately been compelled to give your heart private audience as well. The only surprising part of it, to my mind, is that you should feel any unwillingness to do so.”

“ You talk of my weakness as if it were my strength, Armitage. I am deeply conscious of the conflict of rival impulses bidding for my patronage. It is far from pleasant to feel oneself put up to auction every day in this way.”

“ So I should imagine,” responded the clergyman ; “ but you have the satisfaction of knowing that it is your own doing. You talk of the absurdity of submitting to this dual control of heart and brain, and yet you do submit, — you are forced at length to take advice from both quarters. This, then, is your modified opinion, I suppose. You no longer regard the choice between the several impulses as being made once for all ; every fresh point raised for decision requires a fresh choice ; is that it ? Pray, what is the standard of reference by which you make your awards ? ”

“ It is not so difficult to make a rough classification of most questions that come up to be settled, according as they seem to fall within the appropriate domain of reason, or unreasoning impulse,” said Arnold. “ For instance, when I am making up my accounts I try to do so dispassionately. If I allowed myself to rush to the conclusion that I had been cheated, as I sometimes feel tempted to do, and went about accusing people without any positive evidence to prove the truth of my suspicions, I should

deserve the worst penalty that the law could inflict, as well as the contempt of my neighbours for my egregious lack of common sense. Then, again, when anything moves my sympathy, or my admiration, I daresay I act quite spontaneously, and without any reference to reason. But that is not the same thing as saying that I ought to do so. What unpremeditated crime could not be justified on exactly similar grounds, were that the case ?”

“But I do not wish you to act unreasonably,” returned Armitage, taking up his cudgel with pugnacious energy. “It is just as much against my principles to refuse to listen when reason speaks, as to accept it as my sole director. Talk about the folly of consistency as much as you will, but you will hardly have the effrontery to tell me that the inspiration of this soothing doctrine was originally due to your reason. If you think about it, you will see that you hold the opinion upon no firmer basis than a mere pleasing intuition, and that it is no more subject to the restraint of your intellect than any other casual whim.”

“Upon my word, Armitage, we seem to be changing places. You need not to be so determined a stickler for employing the brain’s winnowing process upon everything. So you no longer hold this passion for systematising the

universe to be quite the delusive *ignis fatuus* you once thought it ? ”

“Your mania for inconsistency is indeed a ruling passion, my dear Robur. I scarcely think your taunt against me of being a trimmer is deserved, however. Change your own ground as much as you like, my dear fellow, but don’t blame me in one breath because you can’t agree with yourself, and in the next take credit for your jumble of contradictory opinions. Whatever our personal differences may be, we must really leave it to an impartial observer to say whether my notion of the universe is less systematic than yours. To tell you the truth, I was merely attempting to affix the stigma of a *reductio ad absurdum* to your boasted classification of all topics as either rational or irrational, according as you summon the brain or the heart to adjudicate upon them. But, to adopt a more straightforward method, I cannot regard either of these internal arbitrators as less impartial than the other. Why should I trust one of them gladly and be reluctant to trust the other ? Believe me it is equally irrational to separate their functions and to abstain from using them altogether. Systematic justice will not be done if they are made to sit apart in judgment on our difficulties, and we can pick and choose between them at will. On the other hand, let them be placed

together on the same bench, and there may be some hope of the establishment of order."

"Hopeless," commented Arnold, "they are the scissors of Atropos, and must always be cutting different ways."

Armitage laughed.

"Scarcely a happy simile, my friend. If the parts of every machine worked as well together as a pair of scissors, there would be less waste in most manufacturing processes, I suspect. Anyhow, the two parts of your scissors achieve their object, which is to effect one cut, is it not? The absurdity of acting by passion alone is sufficiently obvious, and you have already supplied me with an instance of it. But consider the opposite course,—the complete bondage of a man to what he calls 'reason,' meaning nothing more by that than *his* reason. Why, I will maintain that even in the case you supposed—the occupation of making up your accounts,—you would do better to listen to both monitors than exclusively to one. For, after all, it is from your heart that you learn not to suspect others without just cause: the unworthy impulse to do so is repressed, and you set about your business with a calmness not of the reason, but which leaves the reason free to act. My point is that the first conviction of your error comes from the heart, in the case supposed, warning you not to trust a distorted

impression in the uneven mirror which is constantly deceiving us with its false reflections."

Arnold held out pertinaciously, however.

"I see nothing in what you say but an admission of the separate functions of the intellect and—h'm, well—the sympathetic faculty," said he, unmoved to all appearance by his opponent's persuasiveness. "My analysis was defective, I grant you, but not unsound, so far as it went. In this case of my conceiving a certain suspicion consequent upon making up my accounts, I merely intended to touch lightly on those stages of the matter which were actually appropriate for the reason to discuss, and for the reason alone. It is immaterial to show me that the heart takes its place at certain other stages. I could have told you that myself."

"You mistake me, Robur. All I desire to prove is the intimate connection between the functions of sympathy and intellect. You speak as though I had associated the two so closely together as to think of them almost as synonymous terms. The two names correspond to two distinct notions in my mind, however. All I maintain is that in practice the boundary line cannot be fixed between them. The further we carry our analysis, the more inextricably blended do they appear. Take the most minute operation of the brain, and say if you can entirely dissociate

it from the character and sympathies of the man who performs it. No conclusion was ever reached that had not some personal colour in it; even those of the calculating machine always come out tinted to the taste of the individual who manipulates it. What a world it would be if things were otherwise! Imagine the warm hues fading out of life as everything—religion, love, art, science shrivelled up, leaving only lifeless shells and wisps, while pale Impersonality settled down closer and closer over the face of Nature, till all the flowing outlines and soft contours were merged in one ghastly dead level of uniformity.”

“And yet this wet blanket of yours is the immortal vesture which some true worshippers aspire to wear,” remarked Arnold.

“It makes me shudder to picture such a state,” Armitage went on, not heeding the interruption. “The constant unrest, the never-satisfied search after the hidden things of the universe, the wild haste to pry into visible Nature at every point where an opening can be effected,—all this childish anxiety to get at the works without caring how much the poor clock-face is mutilated in the attempt, this wholesale ‘murder to dissect,’ are inevitable accompaniments of that final usurpation by the intellect of our absolute control which your arguments, pushed to their logical conclusion, would seek vainly to justify.”

“We must be prepared to resign superfluous luxuries, and comfortable theories, you know,” said Arnold somewhat mischievously. “But we still hope much from the widest possible application of scientific methods. The consciousness that every step in this direction brings us nearer to Truth ought to be enough to compensate for other losses.”

“Well, if you beg the whole question in that fashion, I must give you up,” and Armitage raised his hands in a deprecating gesture. “But I know you better than to believe you are really so one-sided. No; exercise your mental faculties, but exercise your sympathies as well. You disclaimed the reputation of being a monster a short time back. Very well, then; allow yourself free development all round. Why should you want to pigeon-hole the universe? No affairs belong exclusively to either heart or brain, but these two elements are found cohering just as closely in the molecules of experience as in the mass. Sympathy can kindle a halo of romance about the dullest physical fact, nor is there any impulse so lofty, or any reality so transcendental, but reason sets it in a clearer atmosphere, dispelling the mists of delusion, and clothes it with solid texture.”

“What an apology for religious speculation you are making, Armitage! I understand now your warmth on the subject of human love. It

is so entirely a personal matter that you are convinced it can be the introduction to no religion but one which has a personal object of worship."

"Quite so," was the reply; "I hope you feel none the worse towards me for the discovery. Indeed I regard every essential in our devotion to each other as pregnant with peculiar indications of the heaven that 'lies about us,' not only in our infancy, but rises more distinctly upon the wise man's vision as he advances in life."

Arnold rose and shook himself. "Then suppose we stop our talk here," said he, "for I have no time to be led into a disquisition on the use and abuse of symbols. Besides, there is another matter I want to ask you about. What do you think of Frank Dalton?"

"The very thing I had on the tip of my tongue," cried Armitage.

A grave discussion of the young gentleman's attainments and position followed. No satisfactory result came of it, however. Arnold showed his friend a letter from Grace Dalton about her brother which he had just received, and they both agreed that it was hopeless to expect Frank to get any good out of a career at the university.

"He'd be sent down after the first term, if

they ever found a College that would take him," said Armitage.

"I wish he'd confide in me," said Arnold; "it's just possible he may have a turn for something or other, and we might help him to it, if we only knew what it was."

CHAPTER VII.

A THOROUGHGOING CHAMPION.

“Killing is good to frustrate an offence to come, not to revenge one that is already past; and more an act of fear than of bravery; of precaution than of courage; of defence than of enterprise.”—*Montaigne*.

It was a clear night when Arnold crossed the threshold, and found himself outside the vicarage. He was glad he had not driven over, and looked forward to an enjoyable walk home in the starlight, for it was too early as yet for the moon to make her appearance. He was in no hurry, having only hastened his departure from Burfield for fear of keeping Armitage from some one of his numerous engagements; so he loitered along in the resolve to take his time over the three miles which separated Oakleigh from the clergyman's house. “The moon rises about nine o'clock,” he said to himself, “and I shall hang about to see it.”

He met but few people in the old-fashioned

street in spite of the mildness of the weather, and none of them were pleasure-seekers like himself. Their quick step told of an intention to reach shelter as soon as possible. There were no little knots of smokers at the corners, or in the road ; doors were no sooner opened than they were closed again suddenly, and bolted inside, as if the opener were afraid of being pursued to his hearth by some dogging spirit of evil. Now and again a hurried "Good night" fell on Robur's ear out of the darkness, but the speaker was gone almost before his salutation could be answered. They were still in the midst of their revel, however, at the inn near the top of the street, where the coaches used to stop in old times. The place was not without a certain air of importance, though it had seen its best days. Great gentlemen from London on their way to their country seats no longer called in their pleasant fashion for more than they ought in the black, smoke-dried parlour ; or tossed sovereigns down like half-pence, leaving the change with which they were too proud to soil their fingers on the table, as one octogenarian waiter, a superannuated retainer of the place, solemnly averred to have been the case within his memory. Nor was he the only *laudator temporis acti* that Burfield could proudly point to among its denizens. For the place was still

the chief stronghold of Conservatism in the county, though its disfranchisement had been among the not least shameful results of the last Reform Act. Burfield was still governed by a squirearchy, and the squires stuck bravely to the last few bottles of their good old port. The inhabitants could boast that their town had resisted the spirit of innovation more successfully than any other for a circuit of many miles, and would often hold up their principal hostelry as a fine sample of the way in which the local tenacity asserted itself. And, indeed, most of its traditions remained unimpaired. County balls were still given under its antique roof; the magistrates continued to administer the law with their usual lack of discretion and efficiency in the apartment dedicated to that purpose under the ironical title of the Justice-room, and from the fact that the volunteers had always held their head-quarters there ever since the dawn of their existence it may be reasonably concluded that the inn was as much the centre of attraction for the choicest and most select spirits in Burfield as it had ever been.

The light from the bar within was streaming out into the broad porch as Arnold approached. It was so strong that it attracted his attention for a moment, when he thought he saw the outline of a face just on the verge of the deep

shadow outside. - He was not surprised, however, that there should be a loiterer to listen to the chorus which was being performed by the revellers with much clinking of glasses and exchanging of personalities. At a distance the effect was more exhilarating than a connoisseur might have judged it to be at close quarters, and Arnold stopped on the other side of the way to listen too. When he looked into the shadow again to see if he could make out anything more about the face, it had completely disappeared.

"A ghost, perhaps," laughed the young man to himself; "tempted out of Hades to take a fond look at the scene of former beer-swilling triumphs."

The chorus came to an end with a wild falsetto screech as he moved on. The last few outlying cottages were past, and he began to mend his pace for the long stretch of lonely road that lay before him. Presently he came to a gate leading into a field which was bounded on the side of the road by a tall quickset hedge. He halted, and resting his arms on the top began to light his pipe.

"I never could keep a match going in the least breath of wind," he muttered, successfully accomplishing this feat only after burning his fingers a good deal. Then he looked across the field to where the sky was growing paler, and

watched Diana slowly kindling her torch. Up it came majestically, with no unsteady brandishing; a silver lamp among the blue foliage of some distant firs. The mystic influence was not long in stealing over Arnold's senses,—he was predisposed for it by his talk with Armitage,—and he began to rave inwardly with that same lunacy which only lovers may unblamed experience. He thought of Ursula, and—and—her aunts. What was she—what were they—doing or thinking at the present moment? His passion made him ubiquitous, or rather, left his body standing there, and carried him away. Ursula was not there, so he must go to her. And yet—and yet,—was there nothing, then, to reproach him, and make him fear to think intimately upon her so soon? Had there been no disloyalty in those rebellious words of his to Armitage? He had not thought of this in the heat of friendly antagonism; but now, alone under the dim luminous canopy of night, he felt the hushed presence of sincere Nature as a rebuke, and cursed himself for an intemperate fool.

There are some unlucky people in the world who are being constantly victimised by an irresistible impulse to say on purpose what they do not mean,—sometimes the very opposite to what they really think. Perhaps this is the

commonest form of lying. At any rate, it is the least harmful; for the chief sufferers are the members of this irritable class themselves. The words they utter during these temporary aberrations cause some little surprise at first to persons unaccustomed to the complaint, but their memory can seldom be such a lively source of chagrin and regret to any as to the unfortunate beings who are responsible for them. And the worst of it is that persons subject to this hallucination are firmly persuaded of the serious reality of their fancies till the fit passes, and they discern with amazement the grotesque hideousness of the forms which they took to be angelic, the actual grace and symmetry of those seeming deformities.

The brain's photography is an occult and mysterious process. Persons, places, circumstances,—it has plates enough in its dark recesses for them all. But, whether it is that these objects seldom appear in a sufficiently favourable light, or whether it be owing to some unknown and capricious failing in the apparatus itself, certain it is that a clear and satisfactory picture is seldom to be obtained by the instantaneous process of memory; while even those which are the result of the longer method of continuous association with their originals for a length of time are liable to fade suddenly just

when they are most wanted. Every detail connected with Ursula was impressed upon the mind of her lover with the utmost vividness. The image which he conjured up of Joanna was faint and inexact by comparison. As for Miss Blunsden, any attempt to recall her lineaments was doomed to disappointment; the vague notion of a shapeless, pillowy mass, intersecting and partially obscuring an arm-chair, was all he could make of her. But if the mental portrait of the beloved one had not been wanting in distinctness before, it was microscopic in its fidelity to-night. As he leaned on the gate he acted over again all the scenes in which he had borne a part with her—not that they were very numerous—dwelling as if for the last time on each well-remembered phase in this elusive shadow-dance. Endless were the changes of setting, and each seemed to set off her figure to some new advantage against its relieving background. He conned her words and actions, tried to interpret her moods, gestures, and expressions; and finally began to weave fresh circumstances for her, endowing her in his imagination with a future opulent in picturesque situations. Probably this idolater thought nothing too good for the lady. Would Armitage have warned him to set his affections higher, he wondered. No; his present attitude of mind was not

permanent ; there was no one to hinder him from approaching the heavenly portals in his own way. No man, not even a clergyman, could still retain the besotted uncharitableness of those fierce zealots who had executed their cruel sentence on the young lover in the legend of the caves which he had heard with Ursula. Sweet Ursula ! If he were to die before another morning dawned, no password could be better than that for his lips to shape with their last breath ; dying or living, it was his strongest bulwark against ill, not made with hands.

What was that ! The snapping of a twig, perhaps, where some cat was creeping along under the hedge intent upon its poaching ; or it might have been the noise of something falling, or being struck, a long way off, so that it seemed close at hand only through the deception of darkness and surrounding quiet. While he was hesitating between some such possible explanations of the matter, the sound of a hurried step coming down the road from Burfield changed the current of his thoughts, and made him turn round to look at the individual who was approaching. The moon was not high enough to make any passing object very clearly visible, especially against the sombre-tinted landscape which lay beyond the hard white road. Arnold saw the tall figure of an ungainly man

or boy muffled in a long coat slouching along at a great rate. His hat was tilted forward over his eyes, hiding everything of his face except what was concealed under the ulster's high, upturned collar. Both his hands seemed to be deep in the secrets of that garment's pockets, which were apparently too precious to be confided to a stick, for there was no sign of such an article about his person. He was walking on the opposite side of the road to Robur, and as far away from him as possible.

"Good night," said Arnold, as this apparition shambled past.

There was no answer, or any indication on the part of the person thus saluted that he was conscious of being addressed.

Arnold's curiosity was aroused; was the fellow deaf or mad? His extraordinary gait pointed to the latter supposition.

Standing in the middle of the road Arnold commanded a full view of him for some distance as he receded down it. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and putting his hands to his mouth shouted "Hulloa!" several times. But the stranger made no response, and was quickly out of sight behind a bend. Left to himself again Arnold took a look all round, as if he rather expected to have attracted the notice of other nocturnal ramblers by his

vociferations. Nothing stirred, however ; and the comicality of the situation struck him so irresistibly as he stooped to hunt for his pipe, which he had accidentally dropped in the grass by the wayside, that he was forced to sit down on the gate with it in his hand, and laughed silently till his sides ached.

“What in the world possessed me to make such a fool of myself?” he chuckled ; “staring at the moon makes one superstitious, I suppose. However, it’s only natural that every idiot I meet should remind me of the young beggar.”

The freshening breeze made him feel chilly, so he leaped from the gate, and turned his face homewards. But, try as he would to banish his late disturbance of ideas, and return to his former meditation, Frank Dalton would get mixed up with them in the oddest manner. He could not bear to think of Ursula with the lout’s vacant, expressionless face always peeping over her shoulder ; so after many vain attempts he give up altogether. Combatting his reluctance to contemplate any other object at the present moment, he began to turn over the contents of Grace’s letter in his mind. She had mentioned her suspicion that Frank had lately been getting into bad company, and alluded to his reticence as to what he did at Copesbury, an unusual display of caution on the boy’s part. “She

is so used to the absence of good qualities in him," mused Arnold, "that she might be pardoned for supposing this to be a hopeful sign merely because it is an uncommon one, poor little thing."

He did not mean to be uncharitable, but there are times when the best of us may be rather hard on the ingratitude from which our friends suffer. Sympathy for the sister had been setting him gradually against the brother ever since he came back from abroad, and saw how the wind was blowing. But there was one passage in Grace's appeal which he could not forget, and the memory of it had a chastening effect upon his resentment.

"Don't be hard upon him," it ran; "his chances have not been very great, when one comes to think of it." Arnold thought of Mrs. Dalton, and acknowledged that there was some justice in this remark. The letter concluded with these words,—“I wish you could get rid of your dislike to poor Frank. It would be the first step towards persuading him to like you, and this would give you a hold over him which I know you would turn to account for the happiness of all of us.”

She was a good sister, this girl. There might be nothing else in her, but some people would have known how to value the half-loaf in her

case. Well, he would try to please her in this respect. He would begin acting the part of elder brother to both of them by looking up Frank for himself on the morrow.

He walked on; it seemed colder, and there were some clouds on the horizon. Beyond the bend in the road round which the mysterious pedestrian had disappeared the way ran in a straight line for a considerable distance, and there were no lanes turning out of it. Arnold looked for any traces of this eccentric person, but none were visible. Presently he quickened his pace with the intention of catching up the other, or keeping him in sight. He had walked about a mile and a half at no mean pace without catching a glimpse of a human being in front of him when he came to the hill which bounded the view from his windows at Oakleigh towards Burfield. Here he gave up the chase, feeling convinced that the object of it must have taken to his heels as soon as he was out of sight, or left the beaten track for a more adventurous route across country. The hill seemed longer to-night than usual as he trudged through the deep cutting, and looked up at the high banks on each side covered with furze-bushes, and surrounded by a thick belt of firs which he had often compared to a group of sentinels on duty over the approach to the village. Their sombre

crests stood out in well-defined outline against the paler tint of the sky, and as they swayed slowly backwards and forwards, sometimes almost touching each other, Arnold fancied that they were communicating their recognition of him all down the file, whispering that he was privileged to pass unchallenged. Arrived at the top he stood still for a moment, gazing over a little copse of evergreens, which lined a steep slope on his right, at the broad roof and quaint chimneys of his home. The lower part was hidden from sight by the foliage of the copse, as it descended, and became merged in the trees and shrubberies of his own garden; but the mass above was not intercepted, and his eyes rested on the surface of the familiar eaves and gables distorted into fantastic shapes by the moonlight.

Now it is a matter of every-day experience that when we are looking, however intently, at a certain object, our attention may be distracted by something else, not immediately in our line of vision, but yet not outside its range. A slight movement in the bushes close before him, accompanied by a momentary gleam of light, caused Arnold to suddenly drop his eyes to a level with this unexpected phenomenon. Someone was in the copse with a lantern, and he knew who that someone was. His instinct had

not been mistaken in connecting the stranger of the road with Frank Dalton, in spite of his long coat and assumed carriage ; for during the brief interval between the accidental turning-on of the lantern and its hasty extinction the light fell full upon its owner's face as he crouched in the covert, revealing enough of his garb to establish the identity beyond all doubt.

“What can he be there for ?” wondered Arnold. His first impulse was to hail him again ; but reflecting that Frank was evidently determined to keep out of his way, he resolved to go on down the hill till he should reach a gate that turned into one of the Oakleigh fields, and then work his way safely through the copse so as to take the young gentleman by surprise in the rear. Perhaps Frank had been too much occupied with his lantern to notice the other's close proximity ; if so, he must be caught before he had time to take alarm and escape. It would never do for the boy to get away unchecked. Who could tell what mischief might not be averted if he was only stopped now ? He might be on the point of running away from home in some mad freak. Yes ; for his sister's sake he must be stopped.

For his sister's sake.—Where was Grace now that the catastrophe which she had vaguely foreshadowed was coming on so fast that no

intervention could ward it off? Could she have known when she parted from him last what guilt he would have recklessly incurred before their next meeting. Oh, Frank! use this last chance; stop yourself this once, and think; there is no time for anyone else to hinder you from sealing your future hopes with a fearful crime!

It was too late. As Arnold started to execute his manœuvre Frank stole noiselessly forward. His lantern was useless, but he did not want it. There was light enough, and his hand never trembled as he raised it, never shook as he let loose his leaden messenger on its coward's errand. A dull report, a short groan as the victim fell—these sounds produced an overpowering effect on the perpetrator of the mischief. He shuddered, turned sick, and sank against the trunk of a tree. . . . His hat fell off; his forehead was damp with perspiration, and the blast upon it seemed to be cold as ice. Chilled through as it was, however, it went on throbbing, throbbing,—would it never stop? Something must have happened to make him feel like this: What? His right arm was getting numbed; he tried to move it, but could not do so. Something seemed to hold it down, something in his hand. He strove to unclasp his fingers, and see what it was they held, but they only clung the tighter

to it. He had slid into a sitting posture with his back against the tree, and for a little he remained quite passive, making no attempt to think or move. A scream roused him from his stupor; it was an owl, whose peace of mind had been disturbed by the scene to which it had just been made an unwilling witness. The boy started violently as it flapped heavily by, repeating its dismal note till it was out of hearing; and the shock brought him to his senses. His hand grew slack, the pistol dropped from its grasp, and he knew what he had done. He tottered to his feet, and began to grope unsteadily for the lantern. After some labour it was found, and replaced, together with the pistol, in his pocket. Then he put on his hat. Next he considered the position; had he got everything? Was it safe to go back now as he had come? Casting many furtive glances round him, but always studiously avoiding the spot where the body had fallen, he decided these interrogatories in the affirmative, and scrambling through the bushes and undergrowth, emerged upon the road. Here he paused, irresolute whether to continue his way home at once, or turn to see the extent of his revenge upon his foe. Prudence was not the only motive which urged the former course upon him. Setting forward in the direction of Burfield he slouched along in the shadow of the hedges, not

daring to look behind him. This feeling soon became exacerbated into an agony of fear. What if he had killed Arnold? He had only meant to hurt him, of course; it would be horrible if he had put him finally beyond the reach of malice. As he neared home he would have given anything to know that his enemy was alive, but he could not have gone back to see what had happened; his nervous panic and the lateness of the hour were both against such a proceeding.

Meanwhile the object of all this solicitude was slowly making his way towards consciousness. When that stage was finally reached he found himself lying on his side with one of his arms tucked under him in an exceedingly uncomfortable and even painful position. At first he could not help stupidly wondering who had put it there; then he got a step further, and began to feel some surprise that he had chosen that precise spot to go to sleep in, it was the hardest and the bleakest bed he could remember to have ever had. Besides, was it not within a stone's-throw, almost, of his own comfortable mattress? Ah, now he remembered how it all came about; at least—he carried his free hand to his head, and felt that his hair was matted with the blood from his wound. Yes, yes, to be sure, he had been struck by some weapon. It had seemed to come up behind him, and then—he had forgotten

everything. How long was that ago? Ten minutes or ten years? He would not take out his watch to try and see the time; it had been his father's, and must not be stained with the blood on his fingers. An interval followed, during which he propped himself up against a mound of stones, put there for the purpose of mending the road. Then he fell to chafing his bruised arm; this done, he contrived, not without much pain and trouble, to make a bandage for his head with his handkerchief. Many were the fruitless attempts to stand from which he fell back exhausted. However, it was accomplished at last, and with frequent stoppages he managed to drag his feet along until the lodge at the entrance to the avenue was reached. The windows were dark, the gardener's family who occupied it having long since gone to bed. Arnold was reluctant to disturb them, but there was no help for it; he could not walk a step further without more support than his stick gave him. He was just about to apply that useful prop to the window-pane when he saw a light coming down the drive. This made him desist, and a moment later Gibbins' honest face was bending over him, and the homely Samaritan was pouring metaphorical oil and wine into his master's wound. The patient was weak from loss of blood, and fainted in the bailiff's arms before

he could be got to the house. When he did get there his old nurse's care soon brought him round, however, and he was able to tell Mr. Dalton, when that gentleman was brought over from Beau Séjour by Gibbins in the gig early next morning, that if this sort of thing went on much longer he should be spoiled for life. Paston was telegraphed for by Mr. Dalton's advice, and fortunately was able to come. It was a pleasant surprise for Arnold when the doctor made his appearance, for they had said nothing about expecting him for fear of causing possible disappointment to the invalid.

Paston had rushed away from town impetuously directly the summons arrived, leaving things to "right themselves," as he said, and his patients in the hands of a brother practitioner. But he did not mention this. The doctor had one lamentable fault, or perhaps it would be fairer, as well as more charitable, to call it a delusion; he laboured under the extraordinary and reprehensible belief that fibbing was part of his profession. It is, no doubt, to be traced to the influence of this singular delusion, therefore, that upon Arnold's enquiring whether he had not neglected others to come and see him Paston replied with alacrity, "Haven't got another case to attend to just now, upon my honour. Why, business is so

dull that I am positively inclined to treat this knock of yours as a godsend."

"I must have tripped over something, and fallen upon the heap of stones by which I found myself when I came to," said Arnold; "it stunned me, and I've lost some blood, but there's nothing else the matter."

"Ah, I see," replied the doctor; "come, let me examine the place." This was the very last thing Arnold wanted, as he was extremely anxious that a fictitious report of the matter should be circulated. He was not strong enough, however, to resist long; so after framing a few lame excuses he submitted to examination. It was completed without a word from either of them, and Paston left his friend to go to sleep while he went down-stairs to write his prescriptions, which a man on horseback was waiting to take over to the chemist at Burfield.

"Humph," soliloquized the doctor, as soon as the messenger had been despatched, and he had returned to the library fire; "this is an odd sort of wound for a stone to make,—or even a whole heap of stones. Let me see; wound of entrance just behind occipito-parietal suture; then it goes skirting round parietal, temporal, and frontal bones, and there is a ragged wound of exit close above the superciliary ridge; he'll have a slight permanent scar there, I should say. It's a pity

he hasn't kept the stone that did it, now. That would be a curiosity worth having. Why, bless my heart,"—and here he looked round defiantly, as if to court contradiction,—“I've heard of stone cannon-balls, but I never yet came across anyone who was in the habit of loading pistols with stone bullets.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“ABI IN MALAM REM.”

“For me, undoubtedly
The cutting of my hair concerns me more :
Because, however sad the truth may seem,
Sludge is of all importance to himself.”

Robert Browning.

FRANK DALTON was not one of those who habitually pursue and catch the early worm ; rather he endorsed the sentiment of him who was astonished at the folly of the early worm for rising untimely. But, in spite of the heroic material in his composition, his nerves as yet were not of the strongest : a weakness to be pardoned on the score of his youth. Hence his slumbers on the night of his brilliant vindication of injured womanhood were slight, and perturbed ; he tossed upon his couch, and the sheets got rucked up : the pillow was hot, and a hot pillow is irritating ; in short, at about eight o'clock, bed had become so painfully uncomfortable, and sleep had so completely deserted him, that he

rose and arrayed himself, and descended to the breakfast-room three full quarters of an hour earlier than he had been known to appear on the scene for years.

In the room he found Grace ; and signs, as of someone having already breakfasted ; remnants of eggs and coffee. Grace herself was standing by the fire with an anxious look on her face as she turned towards the door on his entrance.

She greeted him with, “Oh Frank, have you heard ?”

Frank was panic-stricken. He had come down with an uneasy consciousness that his early appearance would inevitably entail sarcastic compliments from his father, and awkward questions from Grace. But his father had apparently gone out : Grace was too much alarmed by something even to notice his own unusual conduct. He sprang to the first conclusion that offered : Arnold was dead or dying, his father had been summoned to Oakleigh, and Grace was overcome by the news. He turned white with shuddering terror, and could scarcely control himself enough to gasp out—

“Heard ? no. What’s happened ?”

“Something has happened to Arnold, I don’t know what ; and papa was sent for, and had to go off in a hurry. There was an accident of some sort, and I’m afraid it’s very bad,

though we couldn't make the story out. Poor Arnold !”

Grace's vague alarm did not tend to set Frank's fear at rest by any means. But, frightened as he was, he tried hard not to show it: and proceeded to do the next worst thing under the circumstances.

“ Oh, that's all rot, Grace,” he said ; “ the way you folks all take on about Robur is enough to make a fellow savage.” He went to the window, not venturing to face his sister. His words came hoarsely and uneasily. “ Precious lot of this beastly fuss you'd make about me if some fellow had smashed me.” Frank's language was ever terse and idiomatic ; but he spoke as a fool. Luckily Grace did not think of putting any meaning on his last words. But their brutality roused her.

“ Frank !” she said. That was all : but there was a great deal concentrated in it.

Her brother wheeled round. His remarks had a stirring effect on himself as well as on Grace. She was indignant now, as well as frightened. He was already, after his manner, persuading himself that he really was an atrociously ill-used being.

“ Well, what's the row now ?” he said sulkily.

Grace's eyes had filled with tears. The combination of painful feelings was too much for her.

“Oh, Frank,” she said, breaking down, “how dare you talk so?” She dropped her head on the table, and cried. Poor little soul! She was a good girl, fond of Arnold, fond of Frank, who gave her a wofully hard time of it even under ordinary circumstances: Gibbins, who had come over with a portentously long face, an incomprehensibly confused story, and an air of exaggerated lugubriousness, promising no hope of a “brighter side o’ things,” had frightened her about his master; and Frank’s merciless brutality was more than she could bear. She sobbed pitifully.

This was more than Frank had bargained for. He had been gloriously bent on avenging what he had conceived as Arnold’s cruel treatment of his sister; and behold, here was the victim herself weeping bitterly for her injurer’s sufferings! Frank’s philosophy was too shallow for the solution of this puzzling situation. She ought, according to his view, to have rejoiced; but these were not the tears of triumphant joy. He began to think that perhaps he had made a slight mistake somewhere: though the thought only took the form of some extra uneasiness. What on earth was he to say or do? The position was eminently disagreeable. With hands in pockets he gazed in silent discomfort at his sister’s bright head: but no

illumination came to his brain. She only continued to sob.

"Come, Gracie," he said at last, "hang it, I don't see what there is to cry about."

No answer.

"I say, you know,"—he moved a little towards her as he spoke, "don't go on like that."

Another pause. Frank's consolatory eloquence did not flow freely; and his sister's continued tears put him out dreadfully. He felt he had said all that could reasonably be expected of him; yet she wept persistently. But his embarrassment received unexpected relief. The door was suddenly opened by the footman, who had come to clear away the remnants of Mr. Dalton's hurried repast. That admirable and judicious functionary had no sooner appeared than he vanished again; surmising from Gracie's position that his presence might be inconvenient; and proceeded to make strange clatterings outside with a tea-tray. But the spell was broken. With a strong effort Grace recovered herself, and dried her eyes rapidly. Frank stood still, awkward and silent. The footman reappeared, cleared the table promptly, relaid it for breakfast clamorously, and disappeared. Frank began to feel a little hopeful.

But the interruption had turned the current of Grace's ideas. Frank was now uppermost in

her mind ; and force of habit prompted her to lecture him. She spoke with asperity, as she began to make the tea.

“What has brought you down so early to-day ? We have generally finished breakfast by the time you are ready to begin.”

“Well, hang it, when a fellow does get up on a beastly cold morning like this, you might have something better to say than slanging him.”

Grace tilted the kettle over the tea-pot.

“Now, Frank, I do wish you wouldn’t use words like that. And you know it’s quite true. I don’t understand what has brought you down so soon. I didn’t expect you till nine at least.”

“Why, a fellow can have a headache without being abused for it, I should have thought.”

Whenever Frank held himself up as an injured being, he generalised ; and spoke of himself vaguely as “a fellow.”

“A headache ! People don’t generally get up early because they have headaches, and I’m sure *you* don’t. I suppose you got it over at Copesbury, or something of that kind. What kept you out so late last night ?”

“O bother it all, do shut up that eternal nagging. Can’t you let me be, when I tell you I’ve got a headache ?”

The unfortunate youth was growing painfully nervous. Grace was getting on dreadfully dangerous ground; how on earth was he to invent excuses enough to put her off, and remember them afterwards? Another respite came, however. Mrs. Dalton entered. Grace's rebukes were silenced for the time.

The lady of the house bustled in noisily.

"Dear me, Frank! well, I'm sure! good morning, my dear. Grace, I do hope breakfast is nearly ready. Come and give me a kiss, you foolish boy. How dreadfully cold! And your father sent for to Oakleigh! Grace, are you quite sure the water was boiling? Because tea made with water that isn't boiling is so very nasty. Poor dear Arnold! how dreadful it would be if he was killed! Frank dear, give me an egg please. What is the matter? dear me, you're not looking at all well."

Frank shuddered. His mother's chance expressions awakened his fears to their liveliest again; at the word "killed" he had turned quite white, and her attention was attracted. He stammered out something incoherent about a headache, as he passed the egg.

"A headache? O dear, I hope you're not going to have something dreadful. I know, when I got scarlet fever it began with a headache, and I was very ill. I'm sure I don't know

how I ever got over it ; only we had such a good doctor. Are you quite sure you haven't got a rash ? Not that a rash makes much difference. Grace had the fever long before the rash came out, Mr. Jackson said. I wish Mr. Jackson was here, the doctors here are so very bad. I know some people think ever so much of Mr. Wilson at Copesbury, but he has never done me any good. And that reminds me that I know there's been a great deal of scarlet fever at Copesbury. Frank dear, I do think you'd better go to bed again. Give me the toast please, Grace. Whatever we shall do I don't know, with poor Arnold dead, and you down with scarlet fever, it's dreadful. I do wish your father would come back, only he never knows what to do, and why that man Gibbins came over for him I'm sure I don't know.”

“Mother !” said Grace, who was rapidly nearing the break-down point of misery again, “how can you talk like that ? Arnold isn't dead ; I'm sure he isn't,”—she choked a little, but recovered herself—“and Frank's only got a headache.”

“Grace, my dear, I'm ashamed of you. I'm sure Frank's dreadfully ill ; just look at him,”—Frank was certainly pale—“and how you can talk about a headache like that I don't know. But you're always so unkind to him, I don't believe you have any feeling at all, and you

don't seem to care a bit about poor Arnold being murdered. I'm sure it's some of his tenants been trying to murder him, because I know it was something about his head being hurt; and what with Gladstone and Parnell and all these people, it's no wonder; though what they do it for I don't know; is it very bad, Frank dear?"

Frank's symptoms of uneasiness had been growing rapidly. As a matter of fact, there had been no suspicion of the cause of the accident: Arnold's own statement that he had fallen and struck his head had been unhesitatingly accepted by his dependents, and the idea of murder was a new and original one of Mrs. Dalton's own brilliant imagination. The suggestion, coming so alarmingly near the truth, was more than Frank could stand. He rose.

"It's awfully bad," he said, "and I want to go and get quiet. And for goodness' sake don't bother me."

He fled, and left Grace to suffer the miseries of her mother's terrible conversation. He had had a thoroughly bad time of it. After his wild attempt to punish Arnold he had been quite overcome by complicated terrors; partly of discovery, trial, imprisonment, perhaps death; partly from the acute reaction of his nervous system: partly from an unaccustomed sense of crime. He had fled home, he hoped, unnoticed:

but every rustle of the hedges, every distant hoot of the bird of night, filled him with alarm : the “broad open eye of the solitary sky” gazed down on him pitilessly ; the wan light of the moon struck him with vague tremblings : he had escaped to bed unquestioned ; yet he suspected suspicion. All night as he tossed on his thorny couch, worried by the prickles of blankets, he rehearsed the scene he had gone through, with variations ; when he did get to sleep the cry of the owl, the crack of the pistol, Arnold’s groan as he fell, mingled with his dreams. He saw Arnold lying dead on a bier, and rising ghastly and bloody to denounce him ; Rock appeared to his sleeping visions putting on a black cap over a flowing wig, and handing him over to Mack to be executed. Awake or asleep, there was little difference in his sufferings. He had been on tenter-hooks when he talked to Grace : he had been on the rack while his mother babbled, after her merciless fashion. From them he escaped, but he could not escape from himself. Was Arnold dead ? Was he very badly hurt ? Had he recognised and denounced his assassin ? When Captain Mack, or any of his favourite novelists talked of Vengeance, it had sounded attractive, manly, heroic,—but their accounts did not tally with his experience. He was ready to swear never to take vengeance on anybody any more.

As he paced his room, or flung himself on his bed, the same series of questions whirled round and round in his brain in endless circles, and still no answer came to any of them. He could only wait in misery. Two or three times he thought of flight, but he felt it was hopeless.

So passed the morning tempestuously. He descended to lunch, dishevelled and wretched: his general appearance was by no means such as to dispel the maternal fears that held spasmodic carnival in Mrs. Dalton's mind. But the first sight that greeted his eye was a welcome one—the hall-door opening to admit his father. Grace had spied him, and was quick to let him in. Frank held back. What if his own share in the accident was known? He heard the quick question, and saw the cheerful expression on Mr. Dalton's face as he replied:

“I don't think there is any need to be alarmed.”

Grace heaved a great sigh of relief. Frank's internal barometer rose suddenly from “stormy” to “fair.”

“Oh, papa, I *am* so glad.” Grace's forehead had recovered its normal smoothness, as she kissed her father gratefully for his good news. “I have been so anxious: and mamma—”

“Well, dear, is it very dreadful? I'm sure I haven't known what to do all the morning, what

with Frank's headache, and the anxiety, and I'm so afraid it's scarlet fever. I do hope he isn't killed, but then I'm always so afraid of being too sanguine, and if it is scarlet fever I'm sure this will all make it ever so much worse." Mrs. Dalton rustled confusedly on to the scenes; she was wound up to talk for an hour, and nothing but her husband's decisive interruption could have stopped her.

"Frank's headache indeed! If it had come from overwork I shouldn't mind. The young gentleman isn't much given that way—more's the pity—and perhaps it'll do him some good. It'll need to, if he's to do any good in the world. Arnold is not killed, I'm happy to say; but he's had a nasty fall, that's what he's had: just a very nasty fall." Mr. Dalton's air challenged contradiction, as he nodded in the direction of his son.

"Then he isn't very bad?" interrogated Frank. A load had been taken from his spirit by his father's words.

"I didn't say that," quoth Mr. Dalton obstinately. "Who are you that's talking about being bad? I'll trouble you not to twist my words after that fashion:" and he half-shut his eyes, as he threw his head back, and gazed at his hopeful offspring through his spectacles. "I never said he wasn't bad. He is bad. So would

anyone be with a hole in his head, I should think. A deal worse than you are, young man, I expect. But that chap Paston will pull him through all right. There's nothing to be frightened about. Have you anything for a man to eat, guid-wife?"

And so the party adjourned for lunch: and the tide of Mrs. Dalton's eloquence was loosed. Wherefore we will close the dining-room door.

The effect on Frank of the welcome intelligence was great. The burden of terror vanished from his spirit, the visions of retribution melted from his brain. His headache was now, as the papers say, matter of history. It would not be true to say that his conversation became lively: because it is not on record that it ever was lively, since the early weeks in his career when it was discovered that he was a wonderful baby and took such a deal of notice: when unintelligible mumbblings were translated by a nurse learned in tongues, and having the gift of interpretation, into expressions of violent affection. But on that afternoon, it certainly came much nearer liveliness than usual. So genuine indeed did his satisfaction at Arnold's escape appear, that Grace really began to think her brother was showing signs of improvement, and repented and apologised for her severity in the morning, apologies graciously accepted. Mr. Dalton, being in a

good humour, was exceptionally contradictory, as was his wont; but his gibes when he was in this mood were not irritating. Mrs. Dalton, on the strength of the headache, was effusively tender; and on the whole Frank had a very pleasant time of it indeed; and when he arose next morning to depart for Copesbury his heart was unusually light.

Mr. Rock's extensive second-hand library loaded the shelves in strange partnerships, or lay on the floor in promiscuous piles, laden with the dust of years. The humble spider, symbol of domesticity, with careful weavings on the window-panes had dispelled the too inquisitive rays of the winter sun, aided by the kindly gifts of mother earth scattered lavishly from the daily cart-wheel. Her sign manual, undesecrated by the prying broom, was left on most available corners; casual streamers, dust-laden, depended from a ceiling that may be supposed to have once been white; and on a lofty stool, with slippered feet tucked in, and loose locks, Mr. Rock himself

“Sat in the midst with arms akimbo.”

The worthy old gentleman was in high spirits. He was of opinion that the web had been craftily woven; his judicious blandishments, aided by the attractions of his veracious comrade, had

had, he thought, a most satisfactory effect upon the fly, who seemed inclined to respond to his invitation without even offering the mild remonstrances of that other little fly whose piteous tale is told in the pathetic ballad to which we have all listened in our early years. He sat on his stool revolving many things in his mind : he contemplated with unspeakable satisfaction the vision of Master Frank standing in the felon's dock : the thought of that unlucky boy's countenance as the judge mounted the black cap filled Mr. Rock's soul with a delight that was positively excruciating ; while the easy removal from the scenes of a gentleman who might otherwise some day make very awkward discoveries was a most agreeable subject for his imagination to dwell on.

There is a popular impression that murders are not committed without strong motives. Hence, to the popular mind, the records of the police news are extremely puzzling. Somebody is violently assaulted, or slain ; somebody else is taken up ; evidence is strong, not to say irresistible ; but there appears to be no tolerably adequate motive. This is unfathomable. Juries, however, have learned, by experience or otherwise, that a very slight motive is quite sufficient. To us, the idea of slaying a man is so intensely repugnant that it seems incomprehensible that any one should feel careless on the subject ; but

there is a very large section of society which really cares no more for human life than for the life of rats or beetles. These gentlemen hesitate to remove difficulties from their path merely because the natural course is attended with considerable danger. Rock had absolutely no motive for wishing Arnold Robur out of the way, except that his removal would secure himself and Edwards from inconvenient discoveries being made; and seeing that there was a tool to do the business with conveniently handy, while his own share in the matter would never be disclosed, it did not occur to this prudent person that there was any possible ground for avoiding bloodshed. As for the tool, he was really such a consummate ass—besides being a bore—that his premature disappearance would be no subject for regret; and the fact of his being a “gentleman” would give a dramatic interest to the whole affair which was positively delightful.

So Mr. Rock sat in his shop and chuckled. He had descended from his “pretty little parlour” up-stairs to hunt out an odd volume that some chance customer had been enquiring about; but his imagination on this particular morning was so peculiarly lively that he had to pause in his search and take up his position on the stool to enjoy the delightful situation thoroughly. And in this attitude Frank found him.

Frank entered with a cheerful countenance. "Good morning, father Hiram," quoth he.

Rock smiled benignly as he descended from his stool and greeted his protégé.

"Good morning, my young Hector," he exclaimed cheerfully. "Come in, come in, and tell me the news." He led the way up-stairs. "A glass of grog now, and a pipe. Ah! he was a great man who invented baccy. How the late Duke of Lackington used to hold forth about baccy now! poor old chap; he was a great friend of mine, was the Duke; used to come to me to supply him with quotations for his speeches in the Lords. Dear me! dear me! he's dead: all the old fellows are dead. They had no constitutions. Now I have. That's why I've outlived them, you see. Yes, and I rather think, I *rather* think," rubbing his hands, "that I shall outlive their sons too. Now you mightn't think it, but I really shouldn't wonder if I outlived you; not a bit;" and the old reprobate chuckled. Frank had not the slightest suspicion of the cheerful fate his erudite friend was counting on for him.

"Well, give us some liquor anyhow, old man, and don't go preaching about a damned lot of old fools who died because they couldn't take care of themselves. Easy: that'll do," as Rock filled his glass. "Here's your health, Mr. Rock, and success

to you and your friends, especially Captain Mack.” Frank tilted the liquor down gleefully.

“Same to you, sir, same to you ; and a speedy settlement to all your enemies.” Mr. Rock followed his young friend’s example.

“Ah !” said Frank : “you know, I had an awful shave, but things came just right. Hit him—enough to make him precious uncomfortable ; and they all think he bashed his beastly head on some stones.”

“Eh ? what ?”

Frank replied without looking up. “Why, I hit him. Jove ! you know, it was beastly risky ; might have killed him, and got in a devil of a mess. But I just hit him on the head, and down he went with his head on a lot of stones, and they all think he cut his head on them ; and he’s thundering bad now, and he’ll just about wear my mark to the day of his death. And there’s not a soul has a notion I did it. Jove ! it’s splendid !”

Frank threw himself back in his chair to enjoy his success, and observe Mr. Rock’s admiration for his valorous conduct. But his gratification was short-lived.

For the bookseller’s appearance was surprising, not to say alarming. Storm-clouds were gathering about the hoary summit of Mr. Rock. His snowy hair was bristling : his brows were

wrathfully bent: his eyes flashed fury: his venerable beard wore a positively prophetic aspect. He had grown two inches taller in his slippers.

"What!" he cried, "you let off that young cannon at him, and didn't kill him?"

"Why, yes," faltered Frank. "What the devil's up now?"

"Young man," said Rock—and his voice was as the voice of a seer—"young man, can you dare to come into the presence of one like me, with the weight of years upon my head; with the snowy locks of age upon my brow: one who has been on terms of the closest intimacy with the highest of the aristocracy: one who numbers among his associates the great, the pious, the noble Mack—dare you, I say, come into my presence, and name yourself as one who has shed the blood of his fellow man?" Mr. Rock was terrible in his wrath. Frank was dumbfounded wholly.

"You," continued the preacher, "who have drunk of my grog: not my grog only, but my port, my very best port—who have smoked with me: who have conversed with my valiant, my knightly companion, him whom I am proud to call my friend, Captain Mack: dare you speak such words to me?"

If Frank's backbone had been extracted he could not have looked more hopelessly limp than

he did now. This attack from the very man who had egged him on to attempt Arnold's life made his brain reel.

“Why,” he growled, “what the devil d' you mean? It was you and that damned Mack made me do it.”

Mr. Rock's eyes positively blazed. “What!” he snorted, “I? and Mack? We made you do it? Oh! to have nourished this viper in my bosom! Oh! to have warmed him at my fire! I! and Mack! take care: take care: say another word, and you shall be summonsed for libel: and the whole world shall know your crime, your cruel, heartless wickedness. But no! Boy, I will spare you.” Mr. Rock's melodramatic power was not great; but he found it useful at times.

“But Mack shall know,” he went on; “that whole-souled king of men shall know of your contemptible depravity: he shall know that he has grasped the hand of one on whose head is the guilt of blood! Go! begone! and never pass my door again. You hopeless IDIOT.”

Frank departed from the house, confused beyond measure. Rock stood at the door with outstretched arms and wrathful mien, like a patriarch driving the heathen from him. Then, after the patriarchal manner—though in a slightly different terminology—he cursed Frank.

Probably the blasphemy which permeated Mr. Rock's emporium for the next twenty minutes exceeded, if not in quantity at least in quality and volume, all the blasphemies of Copesbury in twelve ordinary calendar months.

CHAPTER IX.

NOT IN THE PHARMACOPŒIA.

“Sirrah, thou art said to have a stubborn soul,
That apprehends no further than this world,
And squarest thy life according; thou’rt condemned:
But, for those earthly faults, I quit them all;
And pray thee, take this mercy to provide
For better times to come.”—*Measure for Measure*.

“Look here, Paston: it’s bad enough to have a hole made in one side of my head; but when the other side takes to throbbing and shooting more than the damaged one, I call it rather too much of a good thing.”

Arnold shifted uneasily under the bed-clothes. It was the second morning after his accident, and he was lying much bandaged up, and looking a good deal the worse for wear. The doctor eyed him with an air of benignant interest.

“Ah!” he said in a tone of more satisfaction than sympathy; “right temple? *Contre-coup*, my dear fellow, that’s all: you needn’t be uneasy: it’s common enough. Merely another instance

of the general cussedness of things." It is to be feared that to Paston Robur was now more than a friend: he was a patient.

"Cussedness!" groaned Arnold, "I begin to suspect that cussedness is the rule instead of the exception, a systematic arrangement for the general annoyance. The whole thing is an instance of cussedness from one end to the other."

"Yes," quoth Paston, crossing one leg over the other; "cussedness extraordinary, especially on the part of those remarkable stones. A most interesting case, apparently in defiance of all known natural laws. The normal stone is jagged, and cuts accordingly: but this one seems to have been rounded for the occasion, and projected in an inexplicable manner. Really, a most peculiar stone."

Arnold was silent for a few moments. Then he said with a half smile—

"Well, well, I suppose it's useless trying to deceive you,"—"Quite," interpolated the other with a nod,—“so I may as well own to having been selected as a suitable target for pistol practice."

"Ah!"

"I don't want the facts to be known; which was my reason for inventing the other explanation."

"Precisely. But circumstances being against

you, somebody discovered the facts. Luckily the somebody was myself, and they have gone no farther at present."

"Seeing you have found out so much, you may as well have the whole story; I can trust you not to talk about it. That young scamp Frank Dalton did it."

"Frank Dalton? Good Lord!"

"My dear fellow, I am no more prepared to explain the matter than you are. All I know is that I saw him looking as if he had some mischief on hand, down in the copse: I proposed circumventing him, and got circumvented myself instead."

"But why on earth did he do it?" said Paston, rising and gazing at his patient. "Why in the name of all the gods and goddesses on Olympus and elsewhere did he shoot at you?"

"I tell you, I haven't a notion. He doesn't like me, of course; but this is beyond my comprehension. It can't be jealousy, because there's no one to be jealous about."

"Humph! And why isn't he to be punished, may I ask?"

"Well," said Arnold slowly, "for one thing, I don't feel any anxiety to damage what poverty-stricken prospects he *has* got of doing decently. And, which is a good deal more important, I don't want Grace Dalton to know of it."

There was a touch of tenderness in his voice as he said the girl's name that made Paston's eyebrows go up suddenly. Arnold saw the expression, and read its meaning. He smiled.

"No," he said, "there's nothing of that sort. There isn't the dimmest chance of our marrying. Neither of us is an atom in love with the other. But I like her a great deal too well to be inclined to cause her any unnecessary pain."

"Would she care?" said Paston doubtfully. Grace had not impressed him favourably the night he took her down to dinner. "I shouldn't have thought she was much given to feeling strongly."

"You're wrong, my friend. She's varnished, confoundedly, no doubt; but there's sound enough wood below."

"Just what I thought," said the other with a grimace.

"Paston, if you deliberately mistranslate my language in this fashion I shall be obliged to get rid of you, and employ a new physician. She is not wooden. She's a very good girl, with a mother—such a mother!—and a brother who wants continuous kicking. Considering the facts, one can hardly expect much of her."

"And one doesn't get it, judging by my experience," growled Paston. "However, I suppose you know her better than I do. If

her feelings mustn't be hurt, I suppose they mustn't."

"If that doesn't melt you to mercy, you hardened sinner, please to remember that I owe master Frank's father a good deal, for many kindnesses."

"Frank's father—just the man who ought to know, *I* should say: and then the young scapegrace might get his deserts."

"My dear man, you may as well give in without grumbling. Wilful man will have his way, as Mr. Dalton would say; and on this matter I am a wilful man."

"Well, well," said Paston, "I give in; but I will not be refused the privilege of grumbling. I've half a mind to take it out of your precious assassin myself." He sat down again, scowling fiercely.

"By all means," said Arnold laughing, "if you can catch him. But you're not over likely to find him at Beau Séjour. And you've got to return to town to-night, you know."

"Not so sure of that. I shouldn't wonder if I had to stop up here a day or two longer to look after you. I believe you're getting light-headed." The doctor glared at Arnold, who only smiled. Presently Paston went on:

"I suppose I must go over to the Daltons this afternoon, anyhow, to pay my respects and leave

the latest bulletin. But if I do come across Master Frank he shall hear something he won't like. When I go I shall leave complete directions with Mrs. Marchpane. I should say you will be tolerably fit again in something under a fortnight; and then I recommend you to have another look at the many-twinkling smile of Ocean. Burnport will do well enough if you like it."

"An excellent suggestion," said the patient, with some vivacity. "But that hotel will hardly do for a sick man to recover himself in, I've a notion."

"Humph. No, I suppose not. Besides, you ought to have someone to look after you a bit at first."

"Bother someone," said Arnold, sinking back and closing his eyes. "I'm not going on . . . jawing I shall have a snooze." And he held his peace.

Presently Paston rose, looked at his slumbering friend, and left the room quietly. His threat of staying another day had no connexion with any intention of doing so. His presence at Oakleigh at all was by no means an unalloyed satisfaction to himself: for his practice in town was already considerable, and his disappearance into the country for two whole days was not likely to please his patients much. Now that

Robur was practically safe, he had no business where he was; so he intended returning home by an evening train, after paying his respects at Beau Séjour. A conversation with Frank was an additional item in the programme for the day, to the chance of which he looked forward with much satisfaction.

It was not till he had lunched and had another chat with Arnold, in which it was agreed that Paston should hint the advisability of a family flitting to Burnport at the Daltons', and had learnt some more details as to the "accident," that he put on his great-coat and sallied forth, pondering many things, but chiefly the most judicious method of pounding Frank if he could catch him. He felt vicious to-day, and in the mood for some artistic castigation of the youth who had so nearly succeeded in massacring his friend. Mercy is all very well in its way, he thought, especially when Portia talks about it, but occasionally it is out of place. This was a case in point. If Frank got let off this time, there was no saying what he might not try next. If he, Paston, had the management of matters in his own hands, the family at least should be made acquainted with the young ruffian's proceedings. As it was, there was nothing to be done but to make the most of any chance opportunity of giving the said ruffian a bit of his

mind. But as to letting him off for Grace's sake—what did Robur mean? He didn't seem to be in love with her—that would have accounted for his blindness to her weaknesses—and yet he did not put her in the class of wax-dolls where Paston had in his own mind placed her, a trifle hastily. It did not occur to the doctor that the manner in which he had conducted his share of the conversation at dinner that evening was scarcely calculated to bring out the best side of his companion's character. He had convinced himself that she was intellectually a "stick," with a tolerably pretty face.

"Mrs. Dalton at home?"

"Yessir. What name, sir? Mr. Paston? Yessir. Mr. Paston!"

The footman who had let him in conducted him to the drawing-room, opened the door, glanced in hastily, announced him syllabically, and withdrew silently. Paston stood hat in hand in the door-way.

The only person in the room was Grace; and the footman had surprised her in the act of arranging, or rather touching up, some flowers in a vase which stood rather high, and she had turned her face to the door without dropping her hands. On a table close by was another vase, with more flowers waiting to be put in,

and several ends of stalks which had been cut off to make refractory blossoms fit in.

If you come to think of it, there are very few positions in which a girl looks prettier than that in which Paston found Grace Dalton. In the first place she cannot without a supreme effort wear a "society" expression; in the second, the mere proximity of flowers will increase her attractiveness. Then, her appearance is generally suggestive of domestic care (not cares): and these charms are added to the actual grace of the attitude. Paston became suddenly aware that he was admiring her instead of despising her. He tried to pull himself together and feel contemptuous, but he failed. He had been taken off guard, and had to surrender ignominiously.

"How do you do, Mr. Paston," said Miss Dalton, when she discovered the visitor. "I mustn't shake hands with you yet, for my fingers are wet from arranging the flowers. There," as she wiped them, and gave him her hand—"we so seldom have visitors that I thought I was safe. If we had expected any one you wouldn't have found such a litter."

"Don't mention it," said Paston; "I like a mess,"—he was the tidiest man in the world. Privately, he was wishing that other girls shook hands as comfortably as his companion.

Grace laughed. "That sounds much worse," she said. "I prefer to call it a litter, as being less suggestive of stickiness and discomfort."

"Very well; a litter, or whatever other name you choose to call this arrangement or disarrangement by, is just what I like. Pray don't let me stop you in bringing order out of the disorder."

"I thought it was the disorder you liked," said Grace, as she turned to her flowers.

"Well, I own I said so, but that was due to inadequate analysis of my feelings." He paused.

"Mamma will be down directly," said Grace. "How is Arnold to-day? We were so glad to hear he was not seriously injured."

"Oh, he's getting on all right. It was a nasty fall, and I'm afraid there will be a scar; but he's perfectly safe in Mrs. Marchpane's hands."

The door opened and Mrs. Dalton sailed in.

"Ah, Mr. Pastor, how d'you do?"—"Mr. Paston, mamma," corrected Grace.—"My dear, I said Paston; and after all what does it matter? 'A rose by any other name,' you know. And, my dear, what a dreadful mess! Do please clear it away." Paston could not refrain from a glance at Grace. "I'm sure it's very wrong to have things lying about in this way; and I do hope that heap of stones has been removed; it's so dangerous, you know. Poor dear Arnold!

How *did* he do it? But he always was so careless, walking about in the dark, smoking a horrid pipe. I hope you don't smoke, Mr. Paston?"

"All 'medical students' smoke," said Paston. That title rankled in his mind. A moment after saying it he was sorry, not on Mrs. Dalton's account,—she was blissfully unconscious,—but because Grace noticed the allusion, and he saw her eyebrows come down for a moment with a slightly troubled air.

"You aren't a medical student now," she said.

"No," he answered, trying to take the meaning out of his last remark, "but I have been one. Hence in part my affection for the divine weed."

Mrs. Dalton had succeeded in completely failing to follow these observations. Probably she did not hear them; at any rate she did not take them in. All she caught was the words "medical student"; and on to them she fastened with complacent tenacity.

"I'm afraid, you know," she said, "that you medical students"—Paston groaned inwardly, and Grace's forehead dimpled again—"are very irregular people. Now I wonder that you could come away from your hospitals, or lavatories, or whatever they are, all this time." It began to dawn on her that there was something not

exactly right in her way of putting things. She became gracious. "But I'm sure it's very good of you to come down and look after Arnold, poor fellow. I do hope he's going to get well again soon."

"I should think he'll be pretty well again in ten days or so; and then I have been advising him to go down with someone to Burnport, or some such place, and get some change of air, and sea breezes. But he oughtn't to go by himself."

"Dear me now, why shouldn't we all go down there? I'm sure it must be a very nice place, he seems so fond of it. Grace, my dear, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't, but your father is sure to object."

"I don't think he will, mamma. Of course he'll pretend to, and call it all womankind's nonsense, and quote the *Antiquary*. But he's sure to end up with his 'Well, well, he that will to Cupar maun to Cupar: I've said my say. If you must, you must, I suppose.'"

Grace laughed. In her secret heart she was thinking that she would like to see what Ursula Lorton was really like now; and also that it would be good for Frank to be removed for a time from the neighbourhood; for his frequent visits to Copesbury made her uneasy. This latter argument, she felt, was likely to have some

weight with her father, though she expected no real opposition from him.

But Mrs. Dalton was not to be checked. If she was not to be allowed to find a difficulty there she must find one elsewhere.

“My dear Grace,” she said, “that’s just like you, to talk about your father in that way. But how it’s to be managed I don’t know. Of course we should have to take a house, and servants and things, and seaside lodgings are so very unsatisfactory, always full of people with scarlatina, or measles, or something of that sort. And there’s Frank, I really did think yesterday he had got it”—scarlatina she meant, it may be presumed—“and he’d be quite sure to catch it.”

“I don’t think you need be alarmed about that,” said Paston, as tea was brought in; “Burnport isn’t one of the pet refuges for scarlatina convalescents; and at any rate it’s pretty safe at this season. Thanks, no sugar. And I don’t fancy you will find much difficulty in getting a house to suit you for a few weeks.”

“Ah, that’s all the fashion now with you young people—you never take sugar; but how you can drink tea without it I can’t think.” And Mrs. Dalton meandered off, babbling of nothing in particular, and apparently tending anywhere rather than towards the subject on

hand, into a vague connexion with which she occasionally brought her remarks by accident.

After some minutes Paston rose to go. "Then I may tell Robur," he said, as he shook hands, "that you will take him down and look after him? I must be off now, as I go back to town this evening. Good-bye."

"So good of you to come and see us. Good-bye, Mr. Paston. There, my dear, I'm sure I've got his name right now," sounded through the door as he left the room, and stumbled on—Frank.

"Mr. Paston?" said that youth doubtfully. "You're Robur's doctor, aren't you?"

"The same," said Paston. "Mr. Frank Dalton, I presume?" He was considering how he could induce the young gentleman to accompany him outside the door. Once there, he felt sure of not letting him go till he had offered some friendly advice.

"Yes," said the other. "How is he—Robur, I mean?"

"Ah, you've got your coat on, I see. If you don't mind strolling a bit of the way with me, and smoking a cigar, I'll tell you all about it. Can't say everything to the ladies, you know."

The offer of a cigar had the intended effect. "Right you are," said Frank. "Come along. Let's light up first, though."

They lighted up, and started.

"It's rather a queer case," said Paston ; " a nasty blow, very nasty."

" I hope it's getting better," said Frank vaguely, feeling that that was the proper thing to say under the circumstances.

Paston looked straight in front of him. " H'm. Well," he said doubtfully, " his progress isn't much to boast of.—I'll give the young scamp a bit of a scare," he thought to himself.

" Eh ? Why"—uneasily—" I thought it wasn't supposed to be very bad."

" Always hard to speak positively in such cases, you know. Serious abrasion of the epidermis, anyhow."

" I say, you know, that sounds awfully bad,—isn't it ?" said Frank with uncertain grammar. The doctor's long words frightened him, as they were meant to do.

" Well, I won't say that the parietal bones are absolutely fractured,"—Frank shuddered,—" but it's a mercy they weren't. I trust he may recover."

" But I thought they said there was no danger."

" There's no saying," said the doctor, his voice sinking sepulchrally. " And then, to make matters worse, the whole thing is so mysterious. I have seen a good many queer things in the way

of cuts and bruises and so on,—the much-enduring Ithacan was nothing to me, I take it”—this was a touch thrown in for Frank’s benefit,—“but I never saw a cut like that before made by a stone.”

“But—but—” said Frank, miserably conscious that he was getting very white, “it must have been a stone, mustn’t it?”

“Ah,” said Paston, studying the distant landscape with great apparent interest. “Well, yes, we’ll say it must have been a stone. But, you know, it doesn’t look like it. In fact—don’t *tell* anybody—but I have seen bullet wounds that looked very much the same.”

Frank groaned involuntarily. “No, no,” he exclaimed hastily, “I won’t tell any one.”

“I thought I might trust you so far,” replied the other in a pleased tone, and with an inward chuckle. “I thought you”—with a slight accent on the pronoun—“wouldn’t be likely to talk about it.”

“But I say, do you really think Robur was shot at?”

“Well,—in confidence, you know,—I really think he was. It’s wonderful what fools there are in the world. That kind of thing is always found out, and the perpetrator never gets off. I should think the view from here must be charming in summer.”

Frank was too much frightened to answer for

a moment. Then he said with an effort, "D'you think he'll be caught?"

"Sure to be," replied the doctor blandly. "In fact there is quite enough to identify the would-be murderer without much trouble never blew a ring like that in the open air before and, if the worst comes to the worst—Hullo, you're looking very bad; my weed rather strong for you, I'm afraid; better chuck it away—if, as I was saying, the worst comes to the worst, Hang him."

Paston had thoroughly succeeded in his object: Frank was as white as a sheet with terror. His first alarm after his shot at Arnold had given place to a high degree of self-satisfaction; that in turn had given place to sheer bewilderment after the scene with Rock, from whom he had just come back; and now his original fears had returned with tenfold vigour. He leaned up against an opportune gate, and gasped—

"Wait a bit." Then, recovering his presence of mind enough to drop the cigar, he groaned, "That was a—beastly strong weed, you know." Under any other circumstances he would have scorned the suggestion of any "smoke" being too much for him; but now it seemed his only chance.

"I—I hope you'll pull Robur through," he said at last. "I think I must be going home again now."

“Stop a bit,” said Paston, with a dictatorial twang in his voice, “you aren’t fit to go yet. Stand still a minute.” Frank obeyed. The doctor went on—he was determined to prolong the agony a little more—“Do you suppose it could have been any of the tenants?”

“Must have been,” said Frank, who was pulling himself together again.

“Ah now, I don’t know. Agrarian outrages are all very well in their place; but in a peaceable country like this I can hardly believe it. Besides, they tell me he’s the best of landlords.”

“Lowered all the rents.”

“Well then, that hypothesis may be dismissed. I incline to suspect,” said the doctor, throwing away the end of his cigar regretfully, “that it must have been some one with a grudge against him. I suppose you don’t know any one of the kind?” and he looked Frank full in the face.

“N—no.”

“Sure?” said the other, his voice hardening suddenly.

“I don’t think I do,” said Frank, whose colour was going and coming under his companion’s gaze. They stood silent for a long minute in the same attitude. Then Paston broke into a short laugh.

“My young friend,” he said, “it was tolerably clear some time ago that you were an atrocious coward—when you blazed your confounded pistol at Arnold Robur from behind. But, upon my

soul, you are so much the most miserable young funk that I ever had the misfortune to meet that I believe I could almost pity you with a slight effort. I did think of thrashing you; but you needn't be afraid. A word of advice before you go. In the first place, thank your stars that Arnold Robur is in no danger at all. In the second, a very long way second, thank them for Robur's merciful disposition, and your consequent escape from notoriety. Next, feel grateful to him for the rest of your life for letting you off; and try to make up for the injury you have done him. Lastly, remember that you have a father—and sister—who care a deal more for you than you deserve, and try for the future to disgrace them as little as possible. Now, Go!"

Frank slunk away with his tail between his legs like a whipped cur. Paston watched him some way down the road. Then he said slowly and emphatically, "Good Lord!"

Then he turned and moved towards Oakleigh. Presently he paused, and said confidentially to a robin which was disconsolately hopping round a holly bush in search of berries,—

"After all, I think Robur was right not to let the facts go farther."

The robin only said "cheep," and he went his way.

CHAPTER X.

TWO IS COMPANY.

“Mercy o’ me, what a multitude are here !
They grow still too ; from all parts they are coming
As if we kept a fair here.”—*Henry VIII.*

IN due course the Dalton family arrived at Burnport with the invalid in charge. The difficulties Mrs. Dalton had feared proved of no account. A letter to Miss Blunsden had resulted in the finding of a thoroughly suitable house facing the sea, at no great distance from the abode of that good lady and her sister. It is needless to say that it was Joanna, not Miss Hilda, who had undertaken the trouble of discovering a convenient domicile for the party ; the Mother Superior’s part being strictly confined to criticising the arrangements with considerable severity after they had been completed.

“My dear Joanna,” she said, “it is wonderful to me that you will not allow me to manage these things. You are so very unbusiness-like, so sadly

deficient in method. Now, I'm sure the drains are wrong; and I should have insisted on the house being disinfected. But you are so thoughtless, dear." Whereat Joanna smiled, but held her peace, as her wont was. Moreover, Grace's prophecy as to the line her father would take proved perfectly correct; and he had gone so far as even to intimate that he would be of the party himself, with the uncomplimentary remark, "D' you think I'd be leaving Arnold Robur to be ruined by a parcel of womankind? Not but what he deserves it, the young donkey, choosing to get himself knocked about like that." So, bag and baggage, there the whole family were.

Grace and Ursula were pleased enough at meeting again. It cannot be said that they had been on terms of close intimacy in their school-days,—Ursula's favourite companions were nearly always a good deal younger than herself,—but where there has been no ill-feeling it is always pleasant to meet an old school-fellow. Experience teaches that where old members of the same school find themselves in a room together, with one or two outsiders, the conversation is apt to become esoteric, or, in vulgar language, "shoppy": "Don't you remember how old Thingumbob did this?" and "You know when young What's-his-name did that"; how poor old Brown is in the churchyard, and Jones has got married and left,

and Smith has got his house, and Robinson, who was captain of the eleven, got badly wounded in the Soudan,—these reminiscences of past days are of common interest to the initiated, and swamp all other topics: while poor A and B, who came from two other schools, sit silent, trying to look interested, or make desperate efforts to start a conversation for themselves. Ursula and Grace had always been good friends enough; perhaps the relations between them had been rather closer than between Ursula and most of the girls of her own age, but nothing more. But the circumstances which had made our heroine isolate herself then did not act on her with the same force as formerly; and the two girls extracted no small amount of pleasure out of each other's society.

Mr. Dalton, too, found Miss Joanna's company delightfully bracing. Had Eve, he thought, been rather more like Miss Joanna, and rather less like the rest of her daughters, we might never have been troubled with the Fall and its consequent inconveniences. As he expressed it to Arnold, "you might have been gallivanting round paradise instead of breaking your head to bits in that daft-like way. And if the rest of woman-kind had half her sense—just one half her sense—there'd be a deal less folly in the world, let me tell you." Nor were his wife and Miss Blunsden

less pleased with each other. They had not been five minutes in each other's company before they found one point of agreement in their fear of infection.

‘That’s just what I told Mr. Dalton, you know. At these seaside places they’re always so careless, and at my age, if I was to catch measles or anything it would be dreadful, and the whole place in disorder, and being away from home, and what not, you can’t think what a trouble it would be. But Mr. Dalton’s so obstinate, and he would have us come, and with poor Arnold’s head in that state (we always call him Arnold, you know, because we’ve known him from a child, and so delicate as he was too !). I’m sure it’s dreadfully dangerous.” So spake Mrs. Dalton, and Miss Blunsden concurred, with sundry strictures on her sister’s culpable carelessness ; adding that she would have seen to it herself, but she was so busy. There was a great deal of work for the Guild to do just now, and she had to superintend it all ; for they had insisted on making her Mother Superior, however unworthy she was of so responsible, so sacred an office : so that of course it had been impossible. And so from one point to another the good ladies went on, till Mrs. Dalton knew all about the iniquities of Mr. Montague, and the admirable characteristics of the Guild, and Joanna’s thoughtlessness, and Ursula’s

shocking independence, and how charming they all thought that young Mr. Robur; and Miss Hilda had arrived at the surprising conclusion that Mrs. Dalton was "a most sensible woman, so full of sympathy and sound feeling."

But circumstances were somewhat less favourable to the other two members of the party. It was impossible for Frank and Arnold to feel altogether at ease in each other's company. The former could not avoid some slight feeling of shame in the presence of the constant reminder of his folly which Robur bore, and was likely to bear perhaps for the rest of his days, on his forehead; while the latter, though he had allowed Frank to go unpunished, could not bring himself to make any formal sign of forgiveness, beyond toleration of his society, until at least some kind of apology had been offered: for Paston, with grim enjoyment, had given a dramatic and vivid relation of the conversation recorded at the close of the last chapter. Openly therefore there was no change in the way these two treated each other, but in secret the breach between them, never narrow, had widened to a gulf.

Nor was Arnold's position all that he could have desired in other ways. Of course it was something to look at the same sea, to walk the same streets, to sit in the same room with Ursula, but he hungered for something more.

Picnics, with their divine opportunities, were impossible; and he chafed under the miserable fraud of afternoon tea. To sit in a chair, and suffer Miss Hilda's outpourings of self-satisfied gossip and fatuous intolerance; while Mrs. Dalton on the other side of him agreed entirely in everything, when her words struggled into some dim connexion with Miss Blunsden's remarks; to watch Ursula's profile longingly, where she sat at the other end of the little parlour, while he was able only to catch the sound of her voice through the deluge about him,—these things should doubtless have made him thankful, but they only made him wild, only made him yearn the more intensely, the more bitterly, for something real and tangible. While he was away he felt that he would be comparatively satisfied by the mere sight of his beloved, but now that he was allowed to see her, and so little beyond, it seemed to him that even absence would be more endurable than such a mockery.

It is true that Grace, who knew the state of affairs, and had quite got over her own fancy that she ought to be in love with Arnold, attempted at times to arrange matters more comfortably, seeking to plant the lover between herself and Ursula. But her manœuvres were not often successful: generally they came too late, when Arnold was already compressed between

the two elder ladies, for Miss Blunsden never hesitated to summon him sweetly to her side, probably to give him a word of warning as to the proper way to diet and medicine himself. "Beef-tea and milk-puddings are the best things in the world," she affirmed, with encouraging iteration, while Mrs. Dalton averred that she quite agreed. "So wholesome!" she said, "though I know Frank never could abide beef-tea, poor boy, though why he shouldn't I can't think; and if only Arnold would take it, I'm sure Frank would too." And by the time poor Arnold had framed and uttered a reply which should satisfy the two ladies without committing him to a course of slop-taking for the term of his natural life, the vacant place by Ursula, if there was one, was sure to have been secured by Frank.

Oh, Irony of our Fate! Oh, Cussedness (as Paston named thee, or, since German is the tongue in which we now speak of things incomprehensible, from the *Weltvernichtungs-idee* of Mr. Symonds to the *Zeitgeist* of Mr. Arnold, *Verdamtheit*, let us call thee), strange indeed are thy ways, and irritating past all bearing. The ancient Greek discoursed of the jealousy of heaven; the sage of Oakleigh was wont to hint that "Things is always contrairy;" even the budding philosopher, ere yet he has donned the diminutive

knickerbocker, knows, alas ! too well that when he drops the toothsome morsel it will fall with the buttered side downwards : from Herodotus to Gibbins thy name, in whatever language, has been a name of fear, and thy ways admittedly past finding out. And now was our unlucky hero made thy victim indeed ; for since Frank had succeeded in hitting him, nothing seemed to have gone right ; and in anguish of spirit the ardent worshipper had to behold another, and that other the very one who had injured him, sitting where he himself was yearning to sit, and talking with her whose voice his soul was hungering to hear.

However, things did not always go on in this fashion, nor was it solely at afternoon tea that the members of our two families met. Arnold had speech of Ursula on sundry occasions, but Frank seemed to have an instinct for appearing as a third to spoil any chance of a really satisfactory conversation. It was tolerably easy for Arnold and Mr. Dalton to take a morning stroll together, and in the course of it to meet Joanna Blunsden and Ursula ; nor was it difficult for the two elders to drop behind, while the young people walked on in front. But so surely as this befel, Mr. Dalton junior discovered them ; and, prompted by motives not hard to comprehend, he invariably joined the younger couple. For

somehow Miss Joanna did not attract him. "It's all very well," he grumbled, after hearing his father pronounce an emphatic eulogy on her, "she may be doosed clever and all that sort of thing, but hang it, you know, she's beastly ugly," —a statement which was certainly an unwarrantable distortion of the facts. However, it remains true that Arnold's few chances of a *tête-à-tête* were regularly spoilt by this unwelcome apparition.

It was on one of these occasions, when Ursula was walking, with Arnold on one side struggling to talk, but inwardly cursing Frank, who went silently on the other, that they met a man who paused suddenly and gazed at them in a slightly startled manner, and then passed quickly by. Ursula looked after him with a puzzled air.

"What an exceedingly disagreeable-looking man," she said. There had been time enough to notice that he was a tallish man, clean shaven, with uncomfortable, nondescript eyes. "He looked as if he thought he was recognizing an old acquaintance in me, or at any rate in one of us. I hope you haven't a long-lost brother, Mr. Robur."

"Heaven forbid," laughed Arnold, "at least if that be he. The face struck me as one of the most pernicious I ever beheld: the kind of face which makes one hate the sight

of its owner even without knowing him to speak to."

"Looked a beast," quoth Frank, who felt called upon to say something, and when he did speak made a point of using the shortest form of words which would convey any meaning. They paused.

"Who's the gentleman?" asked Mr. Dalton senior, coming up to them with Miss Blunsden. "Who's yon chap with the ill-favoured countenance? Is it your friend he is, or this young man's?" screwing up his eyes at Frank.

That young gentleman could never understand his father's chaff. He felt now that some imputation was being cast on him by the suggestion of his being acquainted with the unknown object of their attention.

"Never saw the beggar before," he said sulkily. And so this little episode ended.

In the course of their walks, however, they often passed "the long-lost brother," as the stranger had been jestingly dubbed, but he made no further sign of recognition, which, as none of the party knew him, was scarcely surprising. But, seeing that very small incidents suffice to provide a subject for conversation and joking when there is nothing more exciting to serve, his appearance was watched for with daily interest, while everyone agreed in expressing a

dislike of his looks, which in Ursula took the form of a violent repugnance, intensified every time she saw him. Strange enough it is that we can get up such strong feelings about people of whom we know practically nothing. There are men who will tell you that they look upon some other person to whom they have never spoken, of whose very name they are ignorant, as their guardian angel, and that they never dine comfortably unless they have seen him in the course of the day. The instinctive attraction between parent and child has played an effective part in countless romances, and surely has some foundation in fact. And similarly acute business men will often refuse to deal with some particular individual, in whom their neighbours see no evil till there comes a sudden bankruptcy or "mysterious disappearance," with no stronger ground for their distrust than this instinctive repulsion. Doctor Fells are common enough in the world, and superstitious though it seems,* we are given to acting, and acting rightly, on a dislike or regard which has no inductive basis. So strong indeed was Ursula's feeling about this Doctor Fell of hers, who was certainly possessed of most unprepossessing features, that after a few days she declared that as a subject of discussion he was getting monotonous, and as a joke the "long-lost brother" was becoming flat.

During this time the misfortune for Arnold was that the Dalton family were decidedly in his way. He had two allies, though he knew it not, yet neither availed in the least to protect him from Frank's perpetual and most inconvenient appearance. Had Arnold been a trifle less scrupulous, or had Frank been troubled with some small tinge of delicacy, all would have been well : Joanna would have succeeded sometimes at least in attaching him to herself, in order to give Robur free play. But while the love-sick swain saw and was grateful for her attempts to sacrifice herself for his benefit, he groaned selfishly over her invariable failure. He was quite unconscious that Grace also, whenever she was with them, was doing her best in his cause, and—as she was without jealousy—was giving the rein to those match-making tendencies which Thackeray declares to be innate in every woman. But alas ! if she called Frank to her side, it was but a moment he would stay with her. To walk in pairs was a practical necessity ; but her brother refused to see things in this light. He would give some growling answer, and straightway join Ursula and Arnold again, for he considered that he got nearly enough of “ Grace and her beastly nag-nagging at a fellow ” at home ; so that for very shame Arnold was compelled to drop behind and talk to Grace.

At last, however, a more satisfactory oppor-

tunity occurred. One morning Arnold, in a despairing mood, pleaded a headache and general disinclination for a walk. "Well, well," said Mr. Dalton, who was in a peculiarly energetic frame of mind, "I suppose you must e'en stop at home. Frank! Bless the boy, where is he now? Go and see if you can find him, Grace: you'll find him in the smoking-room with that pipe of his, you may be sure. You young donkeys, with your pipes and cigars, no wonder you have headaches. Any way, I'm not going to have *him* loafing about the house all day." And with his unwilling offspring for company he marched away, bent on a longer expedition than usual.

But Arnold, having resolved not to go out, found himself too restless to carry out his determination, and sauntered forth on a melancholy stroll. Mechanically his steps took the ordinary direction. "Of course they won't come this way to-day," he grumbled moodily, "that's just like my luck." But the words were hardly out of his mouth when his mourning was turned into rapture; for there sure enough was Miss Joanna and her niece. Of course two is company and three is none, and it was not the same thing to talk to Ursula with her aunt by as to talk to her alone. But if there must be a third person present, who so suitable as the good soul on whose sympathy at least he could count? So it was

with a brightening visage that he took off his hat and greeted the two ladies.

They walked along together for some while, talking generalities, and presently sat down on one of those convenient seats provided for the public enjoyment at Burnport, and which are rarely to be seen elsewhere. They are specially adapted for the comfort of invalids, having a wide roof of glass and iron which provides excellent shelter, while several persons can sit on them and yet secure a certain amount of privacy. In the middle is a long partition, whose upper part is of thick glass, serving as a back to two benches each capable of holding four or five rest-seekers; while at either end is another partition made on the same principle, and at right angles to the long one, each serving as a back to two more seats. Thus there are four rows of seats so arranged that the remarks of the occupants of one row are not distinguishable by the occupants of another without tolerably attentive listening—unless there happens to be a hole in the glass.

“Do you find Grace much changed since her school-days, Miss Blunsden?” said Arnold, after some chatting. He was seated on one side of Ursula, while Aunt Joan was on the other, and found considerable satisfaction in the immediate proximity of his idol; while to address the elder lady he had to lean over a little, and so

might even touch his beloved occasionally—accidentally, of course.

“Well, yes : and improved, I think. She has less the air of being cut out to a pattern which used to irritate me in her, though not, I am bound to say, more than in many other girls. When your poor mother was still with us, Ursula, she used to say that the eccentric girls were harder to teach but much easier to educate.”

“Well,” said Arnold, “that sounds like a paradox, but I fancy it’s true enough. Coleridge was a long time bottom of his class because he never could give the rules of Latin grammar as laid down in the text-book, but always wanted to express them in his own way : so I suppose he would come under some such rule. What do you say, Miss Lorton ?”

Ursula smiled, as they rose, not noticing the rustle of a newspaper on the other side of the partition. “I don’t think I shall express an opinion, Mr. Robur,” she said, “for the girls always used to say I was eccentric ; but whether I really was so or not I leave Aunt Joan to decide. Fancy admitting that one was eccentric ! what a shock it would be to Aunt Hilda.”

And they turned homewards.

The last hour had been a thoroughly enjoyable one to Arnold. That was a conversation of the old style : no vexatious interlopers to mar its

flow. The omens seemed to be changing. They had been unpropitious long enough, in all conscience ; but now things were beginning to look more promising, and his spirits rose.

Buoyancy is sometimes sternly frowned down by the elders among us because they have it not ; but shall we fling away the only defence we have wherewith to break the force of Fortune's battering-ram ? Buoyancy is a commodity that is scarcely likely ever to exist in a larger supply than is warranted by the demand for it. That market is not glutted.

CHAPTER XI.

AN AFTERNOON CALL.

“What would men have? Do they think those they employ and deal with are saints? Do they not think they will have their own ends, and be truer to themselves than to them?”

Bacon : Essays.

THE fragment of conversation narrated towards the close of the last chapter does not appear to teem with information of the most private character; nevertheless, had the three persons of the dialogue been aware that the seat chosen was one which actually had a hole in the glass, they might have spoken in lower tones; but as it was, every word they said was heard and noted by the occupant of the seat on the other side, the rustle of whose newspaper when Arnold addressed Ursula as “Miss Lorton” passed unheeded by the talkers.

This gentleman folded the paper he had been studying, which was of a frolicsome and sportive description, placed it in his coat-pocket, and watched the departing trio for a few moments.

“Blunsden? Blunsden?” he murmured interrogatively. “Why the devil didn’t he speak plainer? Anyhow, the way is tolerably clear now, and if I have any wits, I shall make something out of this.” He rose and sauntered in the direction Arnold’s party had taken, keeping them carefully in view. They disappeared into Miss Blunsden’s house, and after a moment Robur appeared again. Our friend stepped into a post-office which stood close at hand.

“Can you tell me,” he enquired politely, “if there is a Miss Plumden, or Blundel, or some such name, living in the neighbourhood?”

“Blundel? Plumden? no such name. Stop a bit though. There’s a Miss Blunsden.”

“Ah, that’s it,” said the other with some eagerness. “Well, where does she live?”

The clerk eyed him suspiciously: the face did not attract confidence. Was this likely to result in an interesting case in the police-news? “Looks as if he might be an amy-toor detective,” thought the youth. An “amy-toor detective” conveyed no very definite meaning to his mind, but had a vague general connexion with people who were “wanted.” The suspected one observed the questioning gaze.

“You need not be excited, my friend,” he said reassuringly. “Miss Blunsden is not, so far as I know, the possessor of untold wealth, and if

she were, I should not propose to appropriate it. My errand is of a different character ; in fact, I don't mind telling you," he went on confidently, "that I am the bearer of tidings which I fear will grieve her. I was nursing a poor young friend of mine through a fever—he had plunged awfully, poor beggar, and got in no end of debt and so on—when one day he turns to me and says, ' I'm dying, Wilson. But before I'm gone, I must give one message to you, the only friend I can trust. Go down to Burnport, and find Miss Blunsden there, and tell her——,' but what I was to tell her I never learnt, for his voice gave way, and he never spoke again. And it was from the faintness of his words that I missed catching her name properly before. So now," said this worthy, with a melancholy air and a shake of the head, "you know all about it. So tell me the young lady's—not a young lady?—dear me, very strange!—tell me the old lady's address."

On learning it he heaved a sigh of satisfaction, said " Good morning," and withdrew.

The clerk looked at his companion clerk interrogatively. The latter winked.

" Ah," said the first, placing the top joint of his first finger against the tip of his nose.

" Hookey," said the other.

" Walker," replied the first.

Then both the clerks winked, and suddenly became grave again, as an elderly female entered the office. That evening they discussed the mysterious and communicative stranger with keen interest over stout and oysters, their respective sweethearts sharing their repast and their baffled curiosity.

“Mark my words, Tommy,” said the original clerk solemnly, as they parted for the night on his humble doorstep, after seeing their charmers safely home, “mark my words: *Something’s up*. Good night.”

When the stranger left the post-office he stood at the door and watched Arnold Robur’s figure retreating down the street. Then he pulled out his watch. “One fifteen,” he said meditatively. “Lunch time. No, it won’t do just now. Try quarter past two.” And he retired to an eating-house to attend to the wants of his inner man—and ponder.

At a quarter past two, punctually, he ascended Miss Blunsden’s door-step and rang the bell. A trim maid appeared promptly.

“Miss Blunsden at home?” he enquired.

“Yes; I think so,” answered the maid; but she took no farther steps towards admitting him. He did not strike her as being a gentleman.

“Ah. Kindly tell her that I should be glad to speak with her alone for a few moments.

Mr. — No, I won't give my name. Just say 'a gentleman.'"

"Wait here, and I'll see if she can see you," replied the servant, and closed the door in his face.

"I'll owe you one for that," said the stranger to himself viciously.

The maid ascended to the parlour, where Miss Joanna was seated by herself. Ursula had gone to her studio, whither her aunt was on the point of following her. Miss Hilda had retired to refresh her wearied spirit with sweet sleep. This was one of her favourite maxims, that among the greatest mistakes, if not the very greatest, that mankind makes in England is neglecting the Siesta. So daily after lunch she retired to "lie down for a little," not in the least discouraged by Ursula's firm refusal to follow her example.

"If you please, ma'am," said the damsel—it was a peculiar fact that the servants always addressed Joanna as "ma'am," while her elder sister was most particular about being called "miss,"—"if you please, ma'am, there's a man down-stairs that wants to speak to Miss Blunsden alone."

"What sort of a man, Mary?" enquired Miss Joanna.

"Well, ma'am, he's a man not exactly to call a gentleman," said Mary, puzzled by the deficiency

of her vocabulary, which did not readily provide her with suitable terms to describe the stranger; "so I left him outside, ma'am, and said I would see," she added, with a mind conscious of having advised the very best course possible. "Miss Hilda said as I wasn't to show any one inside that I didn't know."

"Very well, Mary; though I don't think you need be so very careful, especially in this cold weather. There's very little that he could steal, even if he wanted to. However, you had better bring him up to me, as Miss Blunsden can't see him just now. Perhaps I will do instead. What name did he give?"

"He didn't give no name, ma'am. He said I was just to say 'a gentleman.'"

"A gentleman! Well, bring him here. And, Mary, you had better tell Miss Ursula that I shall not be able to come up to her for a few minutes. A gentleman!" she pondered, as the maid departed on her errand, "who can he be? and why does he want to see Hilda, I wonder?"

The door opened, and Joanna turned and faced—the "long-lost brother."

She was taken aback by this most unexpected apparition, and doubtless her air showed it. The man, however, was thoroughly at his ease.

"Miss Blunsden, I think?" he said with imperturbable self-possession.

“Is it I or my sister that you wish to see?” she answered, recovering herself.

“I should think that is a matter of little consequence, if you live together here.”

Joanna felt considerably put out by his manner.

“In that case there is no need to disturb her,” she said. “I presume this is a matter of business of some kind.”

“Certainly.”

“Then will you begin by telling me your name?”

“We shall arrive at that in due course,” said the visitor. “Excuse my reticence; but you will understand shortly.”

Joanna sat down. This mystery made her uncomfortable. For the present she felt that the unknown was master of the situation.

“By your leave,” he said, observing the other arm-chair, “I shall follow your example.” He calmly removed the guarding tape, placed the footstool on the floor, and seated himself in the sacred place. “I trust,” he went on, “that we shall be free from interruption, as this matter is of importance, and may occupy us for some while.”

“You needn’t be alarmed on that score. No one will come in here,” she replied, feeling that she was getting angry.

“You understand, of course, that what I have to say now is to go no farther,” he said.

Joanna was nettled. "I decline to make any promises at this stage," she said with some warmth.

The visitor saw that he had made a false move. "Well, we will defer that point," he observed blandly, "but I have no doubt you will agree with me ultimately."

There was a pause. "Well?" said Miss Blunsden.

"Ah; perhaps we had better begin business. I believe"—he leaned forward as he spoke—"that there is now staying in the house with you a Miss Lorton; Miss Ursula Lorton."

"Well?" said Joanna again. She felt that the man was trying to pump her, and she did not mean to be pumped. He seemed slightly baffled.

"Has your business anything to do with Miss Lorton?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, with some hesitation. "But, in fact, before proceeding in this rather delicate matter, I should like to be sure that I am addressing the right person—a person who has some authority over that young lady."

"She is my niece," answered Miss Blunsden.

The man looked straight at her, and lifted his eyebrows slightly. "Ah," he said, "in any case I suppose I may look on you as in some sort her guardian."

“Well?” said Joanna for the third time.

“I presume you were acquainted with her mother?”

“I think I told you she was my niece. Come, sir, drop this fencing, if you please, or it will be a tolerably easy matter to put an end to this interview.”

He looked at her calmly with an air of deliberation; but moved his chair slightly, so as to make it impossible for her to get at the bell.

“I don’t think you will find it easy,” he said, without any sign of hurrying: “and as for her being your niece, that, my dear lady, is a mere figure of speech. However, as you are anxious to drop fencing—I suppose it has occurred to you that she had a father?”

“What do you mean?” said Joanna, with a sudden spasm of fear.

The stranger laughed. “Perhaps it never struck you that the said father might turn up,” he said, with a slight air of triumph. She said nothing, but only looked at him with bent brows.

“Well, now, I fancy you are pretty well prepared for my information, and can even guess my name perhaps—Edward Lorton, at your service.” He rose and bowed with mock politeness. “And now the question is, what do you propose doing?”

Joanna said nothing; for years she had been

dreading the thing that had now happened. She knew little of Lorton, beyond that he was better missing than found. What was he going to do? His coarse hardness had already made itself thoroughly apparent; and she felt that whatever his purpose might be, she would need all her courage and coolness to face him. She remained silent, making a great effort to calm herself.

Lorton sat down again, in some uncertainty as to what his next move should be. Evidently he did not quite know how to deal with Miss Blunsden. He resolved to try persuasive tactics.

"Excuse me if I seem somewhat rough," he said. "When a man has been knocking about the world as long as I have, it takes the polish off him, I'm afraid, and he forgets just how he ought to behave before ladies. I suppose even when I was young my companions didn't do me much good, and still less of late. You know, perhaps, Miss Blunsden, that I was not quite so good a husband as I might have been, though I must say my wife had a devil of a temper—there again; I beg your pardon. Well, well, poor soul, she's underground now, and I shan't see her again in this world. But though she did run away from me, I have always remembered her: and I determined to try and find the child she took with her. And now, you see, I've found her."

He paused, and gazed at his companion to see

what effect his words were having on her. But Joanna Blunsden sat perfectly silent with an inscrutable countenance. Lorton was a practised diplomatist in certain social circles, and he had expected to find an easily managed victim in the old maid. He had counted on first pumping her and then wheedling or frightening her, but he had counted without his host. After ten minutes' conversation he knew nothing that he had not been pretty certain of before; and his attempt to throw a little pathos into his words seemed to have had no result at all.

"You probably understand now what my object in visiting you is," he said uneasily, after a pause.

"Perhaps I do; perhaps not. I must ask you to be more explicit."

But to be explicit was precisely what Lorton did not intend. He wanted farther information first. He made no reply. The antagonists watched each other for some moments before anything farther was said, each waiting, like wary wrestlers, for the instant when the opportunity for a favourable grip should offer. Joanna won again. Lorton was the first to speak.

"My daughter has been with you for some years?" he asked.

"She has."

"Confound the woman," thought the other, "I never saw one like her for holding her tongue.

Why the devil does she answer short like that? Well," he went on aloud, "I suppose I ought to thank you for taking care of her all this while: am I right in saying, ever since her mother died?"

It was a risky remark. He had no better ground for making it than Joanna's indefinite words to Ursula in the morning about the time "when your mother was still with us." But little harm could come of it, save that, if he was wrong, Miss Blunsden would have some clue to the extent of his ignorance. Luckily for him, the shot was right.

But audacity begets audacity. His adversary resolved to take the offensive.

"Why do you suppose her mother is dead?" she asked.

He winced for a moment, startled by the suggestion conveyed in the words; but he saw almost immediately that his uncertainty on that point had not been misjudged. Joanna had given no sign when he spoke of his wife as dead before.

"I have seen her gravestone at Brighton," he said. It was true; he had seen his wife's name there on a tomb-stone, and taken that as proof of her death. It was another audacious move: if the gravestone was hers, and he was right, that fact was certified; but if he was wrong his opponent would think it was a lie. Fortune

favoured him again. Joanna had made her attack, and been repulsed. It was the first clear score to Lorton. Practically his last question was answered in the affirmative by her silence.

"I fear you are bent on distrusting me," he continued, "and I know to my cost that few people" (with a sigh) "are attracted by the exterior of a rolling stone such as I have been. But let that pass. When I thank you for your long kindness to my daughter, ill-remunerated as it must have been, you will surely give me some credit for sincerity?"

"We have never thought of remuneration," said Miss Blunsden composedly.

"It is very good of you to say so; but you cannot be rich, and she must have been something of a burden to you. Of that burden," he said, watching her face closely, "I now propose to release you."

"Once again I must ask you to be more explicit, Mr. Lorton."

"Curse her coolness!" he growled to himself. "Why, my dear Miss Blunsden, surely you must understand that I as her father, now that I have found her, intend to resume the responsibilities attaching to parentage. In short, I propose to withdraw her from your care, and take her away with me. How pleasant it is to me to see her mother's face again in her!"

“Am I to understand that you wish her to leave us, and to join you?”

“Precisely. I am glad to find that my language has at last become sufficiently clear.”

“In that case, Mr. Lorton, you had better understand at once that I cannot listen to your suggestion for a moment. Ursula, my Ursula, to be dragged from the purity of her life here to associate with your friends, to grow accustomed to their evil ways, to meet perhaps with a fate not less wretched than her mother’s—it is impossible. Our interview is finished.”

Joanna had held herself under control before, but now the rush of passionate feeling mastered her, and she spoke fast and warmly. When she ended she rose to ring the bell. But her visitor was by no means inclined to acquiesce in so summary a termination to the proceedings.

“Pardon me,” he said, “I cannot agree with you on that point. I don’t consider the question by any means settled at present; and until it is settled I intend to stay.”

Miss Blunsden had no choice but submission. She reseated herself, and said, “You have had my answer, and I cannot see what there is to discuss farther.”

“Well, you see, I may be at liberty to doubt whether your answer is final. Consider.” He leaned back and looked at her argumentatively.

“Ursula’s father surely has a right to some voice in the question of her goings and comings.”

“Ursula’s father appears to me to have forfeited all such rights as he may once have had some time since, when he drove his poor wife from him: and such rights as may be acquired by having cared for the child, fed her, and trained her, ever since her mother’s death, undoubtedly belong to me.”

“Ah, well, we will waive the question of rights for the present. Perhaps we may return to them later. In the mean time, I fancy that your objection is based merely on an unfortunate prejudice.”

“You may call it a well-grounded conviction of your utter unfitness to have the charge of a pure-hearted girl, Mr. Lorton. I speak strongly because I feel strongly.”

“So it seems. Of course I can only regret it. Then you don’t see your way to accepting my proposal?”

“Emphatically, I do not.”

“Suppose we ask my daughter’s view of the case?”

“No,” said Joanna calmly, “that I consider is quite out of the question. I can see no reason for troubling the child about a matter of which there is only one solution. She believes that her father is dead, and the illusion is one which it

will be much better for her to keep. The less she hears of him the better."

Lorton found it hard to control his temper in the presence of his adversary's coolness and authoritative air. His plan of action had been based on a thorough miscalculation of Miss Blunsden's skill and resolution. He determined to try a new tack.

"I feared it would be so," he said. "However, I have still another proposal to make. You have made up your mind to deprive me of my daughter, my poor wife's child; and you have implied a good deal that is scarcely complimentary to me. Don't be too hard on me."

"I have no wish to be hard on you, Mr. Lorton. But I must have strong reasons, which neither your words nor your manner have provided, for supposing that your character has greatly altered for the better before I can feel justified even in removing Ursula's impression that you died long ago, much more in allowing you to see her or speak to her."

"You are hard on me, all the same," he replied. "But since it must be so, you may as well hear at least what I have to say for myself. I certainly treated my wife badly,—I own it with shame,—yet do me the justice to believe that I was not altogether to blame even there. She was a good woman, I suppose; but good

women do not always make the best of wives to men circumstanced as I was."

"Your circumstances were of your own making, Mr. Lorton. If a good woman fails to be a good wife, the husband must be the one in fault."

"You fancy so, no doubt; but in spite of that, whatever the reason, I found that she whom I had taken as a help-meet was not fitted for her position."

"That I can easily believe," said Joanna, with some irony.

"Well, anyhow, we did not get on together. She treated my friends ill, and I suppose I treated her ill; and, in short, she left me, as you know. I did not grieve much at the time, but I came to see my error pretty soon. Anyhow she was lost to me completely; I had no clue to her whereabouts, so as to be able to offer her what assistance I could; and what little chance I had of settling down had gone with her. I have knocked about the world since a good bit, earning a living somehow, doing now one thing and now another; and it is no very long time since I found my way to England, and learnt for the first time, in the Brighton churchyard, that my wife was no more. That the child was alive I guessed, as she was not buried with her mother; but it was only when I saw her here

the other day that I discovered anything about her. She is her mother's living image, as you know, Miss Blunsden, and I could not doubt that she was the girl I was searching for."

"She is like her mother, certainly," mused Joanna, "but the poor soul must have been sadly changed by her troubles if the resemblance was so strong as that : yet I can fancy it is true."

"And now that I have found her, I am denied even the opportunity of speaking with her. She might keep me straight at any rate if she were with me. It is a hard thing for a man to lead a satisfactory life on the pittance he gets as a bagman."

"Which pittance, however, you seem anxious for her to share," observed Joanna drily. "You do not appear to be actuated by motives of pure affection, Mr. Lorton."

Lorton cursed her again in his heart for her acuteness. "With her to work for, perhaps I might do better. But what I want you to see now is that my present mode of life is not such that my daughter will be proud of me, if she hears of me, as she may do."

"She shall not hear of you if I can help it, as I think I have said before ; and your words confirm me in my opinion that that determination on my part is right."

"Matters would be different, Miss Blunsden,

if I had something besides the pittance. Give me a decent allowance, or a good lump sum down, and you shall not hear of me again till I have made for myself the position I ought to have, and can ask to see my daughter without being subjected to such taunts as you have been heaping on me."

Joanna Blunsden rose, with indignation in her eyes and burning contempt in her voice.

"What!" she exclaimed, "this was the object of your visit; this was your purpose in pretending you so longed to see your daughter,—not that you might try and repair the wrong done her by your cruel treatment of her mother before, your carelessness in never even seeking for *her* till you thought you might make something out of it, but because you thought it would be easy enough to wheedle an old woman who was fond of her into giving you money. I distrusted you from the first, but I hardly thought you were as bad as that." She paused for want of breath.

Lorton sat in his chair unmoved, looking upon her with his cold eyes.

"About the money?" he enquired.

Joanna recovered herself quickly. "About the money. I have the same answer to give as I gave before to your other proposal. I would not give you a penny even if I could."

Throughout the greater part of the interview, after he had once introduced himself, Lorton had worn an air of submission ; pathos he thought was the card to play with the old lady. But his attempt had so far been a conspicuous failure. He had never been able to conceal the fact that he was acting, though a stranger who knew nothing of his antecedents, and was less acute than Joanna, might have been taken in, and put down his slips merely to the awkwardness of a man unaccustomed to the society of gentlemen : and he had only now and then assumed a slightly dictatorial manner. Now, however, his manner changed. His eyebrows drew downwards ominously and he set his teeth together, while a very unpleasant look appeared in his eyes.

“ You had better think again before giving that as your final answer,” he said fiercely.

Joanna faced him with an expression as firm as his own. “ You have your answer,” she said. “ I have nothing to give you, nor would I give it if I had. Intimidation is useless ; you will gain little from me in that way.”

“ Well,” he broke out savagely, “ you have given me your answer ; now I give you my warning. I know my daughter ; I know where she lives ; I can find her when I will. I shall make your life a burden, and you will never

know what my next move will be ; indoors and out of doors, you will see me when you least want me. Give me money, and I will promise to leave you and the girl in peace. Now then," he rose, choking with wrath, "you see what I can do to you if I will. Choose which you will have. Peace on my terms—or War !"

Joanna was already standing. She gave no sign of quailing before his threats ; but she was grave and stern.

"Peace," she said calmly, "but not on the terms you offer. You have forgotten something, Mr. Lorton—something which happened about four-and-twenty years ago, for which you have not yet settled accounts. Fifteen years of penal servitude would keep you from troubling me much ; I should probably be in my grave before you came out."

Lorton had played his ace, and it had been trumped. He was completely staggered by the answer Miss Blunsden gave him. He expected to frighten her, but the tables were turned ; his fury was changed to terror.

"For God's sake !" he gasped, catching hold of the mantelpiece to steady himself, "don't ! Miss Blunsden, don't let them know of me."

"Is it Peace—on my terms—or War ?" asked Joanna quietly, quoting his words.

"Peace—on any terms. I'll never trouble

you again, if you will only promise to keep quiet."

"Very well," she answered, "I do not feel bound to give you up, unless you compel me yourself."

Lorton breathed freely again. "Well," he said, "you gave me a terrible fright, and perhaps I deserved it. Anyhow, I suppose it was fair play. Now, Miss Blunsden, I've been beaten all along the line, and there's nothing left for me but to clear out, and keep my distance."

"Those are my terms," said Joanna. "Do nothing and say nothing from which Ursula may know that you are living; and leave us as if you had never found her."

"Well, well, I have no choice but to give in." He paused suddenly for a moment, and then went on; "but there's just one thing that I should like to have your permission for: to send her a jewel that was once her mother's. You say I am never to speak to her, and there is nothing else I can do. Her birthday is about now if I remember right,—let me send it her then. She need never know from whom it came."

Miss Blunsden hesitated. Then—

"Give it to me," she said, "if you have it here. I will not trust your sending it; you might make an opportunity for yourself out of that."

"I will send it to you to-morrow," he said. "You may open the packet yourself, and see that there is nothing else inside. I suppose you won't shake hands?"

"I don't think I can shake hands with you, Mr. Lorton. Remember our agreement, and try to change your manner of living. Good afternoon."

"You've treated me better than I deserved, Miss Blunsden. Good-bye."

"Damn the woman," he said, as soon as he was outside the house: "but—we shall see. I've not done with you yet, old lady."

Joanna had borne up magnificently throughout the interview; but the strain had been terrible, though she had given no sign. Once Lorton was out of the house, she broke down completely, and had to withdraw to her own chamber. The two other ladies were surprised to hear in the evening that she had gone to bed with a bad headache.

"Dear me!" murmured Aunt Hilda. "She has usually been so free from headaches. I wonder if she would try a little of my medicine? But Joanna is so obstinate! Perhaps if she had only taken a Siesta this would not have happened."

CHAPTER XII.

PROPOSAL AND DISPOSAL.

“Splash went he as under he ducked.”—R. BROWNING.

THE day after the event just narrated Arnold came to a momentous decision. The “strained relations” in the Dalton family were waxing too much for him, and he was of opinion that matters would altogether be more comfortable if he ceased to remain under the same roof with Frank, and he resolved to move his quarters to the hotel where he had lodged before. The reason he professed was a vague sense of the increased liberty that would attend on the change, averring that he had lived an essentially bachelor life for years, and the domesticity of an extensive family circle, however charming its members, was a trifle oppressive: and he was strong enough again now not to need looking after. So to the hotel he went, not without first being subjected to a volley of abuse from Mr. Dalton, and a diffuse harangue on the evils of hotels in general from his wife.

Not that his method of life was materially affected. He continued to take his morning constitutional as before, in the society of Mr. Dalton—and others. But the change undoubtedly made him feel more at his ease, and it is equally certain that Frank began to breathe more freely.

It was the practice of that young gentleman to disappear after breakfast, and to thrust his presence suddenly and without warning upon the society of his relations and friends when they were least thinking of him; and on one epoch-making morning, he adjourned as usual to the beach, “this way and that dividing his swift mind,” if such an epithet may be applied to the contents of his skull.

The fact is that he was perturbed: his equanimity was ruffled. A dim suspicion was beginning to haunt his soul that he did not adequately represent the highest type of man. Several circumstances had combined to induce this novel sensation. One was the really remarkable treatment he had suffered at the hands of Mr. Rock. He had, as he conceived, done a deed which should cause his name to be registered for ever in the roll of the valiant and chivalrous: he had paid a visit to his ancient Mentor, fully reckoning upon gratulation, praise, and stimulating liquors,—and he had been ignominiously

ejected with language the reverse of complimentary: and this was exceedingly confusing. On the top of that he had been cruelly victimised by "that brute Paston," who had first harrowed his feelings with fallacious terrors, and then had called *him*—Frank Dalton—a coward, to his face. Indeed, the doctor's way of putting things had been at first so insinuatingly deceptive, and then so coarsely direct, that Frank had not recovered from the shock;—in fact the lurking idea that what had been said was true refused to be suppressed. And then again it was impossible to avoid a certain uneasiness under Arnold's behaviour. It made him, for the first time in his life, the victim of an annoying feeling of shame. And, by way of a finishing touch to all these elements of discomfort, he found himself "gone" on Ursula Lorton. His theory of life was undergoing a transformation as the result of her society. He could not square his past conduct with his present reverence for that young lady, who often said things which pierced through even his pachydermatous coverings in a very discomfoting manner. She was pretty—"doosed pretty," thought Frank with a more or less vaguely defined admiration of his charmer's attractions from the æsthetic point of view. And then, she looked at one so infernally straight! If you come to think of it, there are

very few people who do that, or at least very few who impress you with the consciousness that they do. Those grave eyes that look at us so openly and seriously even while the owner is laughing, make us feel much more ashamed of our petty iniquities than any words. And "hang it—she's doosed pretty," he repeated to himself.

Not that his thoughts took the definite shape in which they are here presented. Frank's thoughts so rarely succeeded in taking a definite shape. Very much the clearest of them was the last. This was indeed so clear that it suggested farther consideration. Hang it, he didn't see that he was such a bad fellow after all. It was no use raking up past blunders (a pet formula of our young friend's), and anyhow, he would have lots of tin. Why shouldn't he marry Ursula? Gad, it would be a good match for her—but he was above such paltry considerations! Hang it, he *would* marry her!—He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and chucked some stones into the water to relieve his feelings. Then he rose, to stroll up townwards, and review the situation.

To his surprise, the first sight that met his eyes on turning was Tantivy. Those estimable dogs were rollicking in their usual ecstatic manner. They were tumbling over each other's

tails, and bolting between the legs of the few children who were on the beach at this season, much to the astonishment and often to the alarm of those fathers of men. But the interesting point was, that where Tantivy was to be found, his mistress was not far off. It must be remarked, by the way, that that animal was a standing puzzle to his acquaintances, and nobody knew whether he or they were singular or plural. Pronouns suffered badly in consequence. Was he two dogs, or rather one dog in two manifestations?—a puzzle for metaphysicians as well as grammarians. If he was called “they” in one sentence, they were called “he” in the next: and the chronicler must be pardoned if he is not more clear on the point than other people.

However, Frank on observing the dogs lifted up his eyes and beheld a family party tending in his direction. Mr. Dalton, Miss Joanna, Grace, Ursula, and Arnold; the two latter leading. The tide was down: the party apparently meant to vary their constitutional by a walk on the rocks. Mr. Dalton junior promptly resolved to break in on the *tête-à-tête* going on in front.

Forthwith he carried his resolution into effect, to Arnold’s intense disgust. Poor fellow, his opportunities for tolerably solitary converse were woefully rare, and he had fancied—foolish dreamer—that by taking to the shore instead of the

usual walk the intruder might be escaped. But his hopes were vain. Ursula greeted Frank pleasantly, and Arnold was suddenly smitten with dumbness.

They passed on thus in divisions of three till they reached the rocks. Then it became necessary for each of the ladies to have a cavalier. What was to be done? Grace made a virtuous attempt to sacrifice herself for the sake of Arnold.

"Frank," she called, "come and help me over this, there's a good boy."

"Can't," responded the brother.

There was no help for it. Arnold came and gave her his hand. The little effort at diplomacy had failed; worse, it had produced the opposite result to that intended. Instead of leaving Arnold free with Ursula, he had been summoned from her side. Grace was in despair; but the only thing to be done was to make matters as pleasant as might be for her companion. To help an attractive and not very daring young lady over places which combine the minimum of actual difficulty with the maximum of imaginary danger is no unpleasant task; and Arnold, though torn from his charmer's side, began to feel that after all there might be, in the philosopher's words, a "brighter side o' things:" and he tried to make the best of the situation. Mr. Dalton in the background was making a

great display of lending courteous assistance to his companion, discoursing the while with bland serenity on the rocks, the sea, and the weather.

Presently his voice reached them in an address to Grace.

“Hoots, girl, what are you wanting all that help for? Upon my word! Here’s Miss Blunsden will race you over the rocks any day, with never a body to lend her a hand. Come, Miss Blunsden, let’s see if we can’t catch up these *young* people.” There was a world of tolerating scorn in the last word but one. Miss Blunsden, however, declined the proposed trial of speed; but Grace and Arnold paused for the elders to come up, on the farther side of a miniature chasm.

“There now,” quoth the father: “you’ll see Miss Blunsden hop over that like a bird. You and your difficulties!” Joanna passed the dangerous spot with ease, Arnold giving her his hand.

“Well, papa?” said Grace.

It appeared that Mr. Dalton’s taunts were premature. He did not see his own way across clearly.

“Well,” he said, eyeing the place, “if ever I venture my ankles, not to say my neck, with a parcel of hare-brained young people again—begging your pardon, Miss Blunsden, you’re as bad as the worst of them. Here, Grace! Give me

your hand." And he landed himself safely. "Oh yes, it's mighty fine for you to laugh; but when you come to my years—"

"Here's Miss Blunsden ready to race you over the rocks any day, with never—"

"Hark at her! just hark at her! Miss Blunsden, don't you pity an old man with such a daughter? 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth'—what is it? There, go along with you, and leave us to gang our ain gate."

They went on. Ursula and Frank in the mean time were rapidly distancing the rest of the party, accompanied by the dogs, which were accustomed to such expeditions. In spite of the girl's efforts, the conversation evinced a decided tendency to lapse. Frank found great difficulty in rising beyond monosyllables. Here he was, alone with the object of his affections. Obviously, he ought to seize his opportunity, and call the young lady's attention to the fact that there was a suitor who was only waiting for her to fall into his arms. But how on earth was he to begin? Ursula's remarks didn't seem to lead in the right direction, and presently ceased altogether. The fact is she was getting considerably bored. But Frank couldn't stand this. He resolved to make an effort.

"Beastly cold it's been," he suggested tentatively.

“Oh . . . yes. It has been cold.” Ursula’s mind had been wandering. She had been vaguely thinking about the Daltons in general, and about Frank in particular; and in the case of the latter her thoughts had been anything but complimentary. In the silence, she had forgotten that he was beside her, and the awakening, characteristically effected, startled her, and made her answer vacantly. Also, it heightened her colour slightly.

Frank observed and was gratified. He took the blush for a compliment. A happy thought occurred to him—why should valorous youth fear to plunge in unknown waters? None but the brave deserve the fair! He would plunge into conversational subtleties hitherto untried; pay her a compliment.

So far, excellent. What compliment? He looked round, “from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,” with vague reminiscences of the assistance he had gained in his school-days from floor or ceiling in the absence of a crib. By Jove! the very thing!

“I say, there were some awfully jolly sketches among those.”

“Where?” asked Ursula, unconscious.

“Those of yours, you know.”

Ursula was taken aback. This was quite a new tack Frank had gone off on.

"I'm afraid I have no good ones," she said. "I wish I could paint as well as Grace. She was much better than I at school, though of course I haven't seen anything of hers since. I hope she's kept it up."

Thus did she attempt to turn the conversation, but in vain. Frank was obtuse, and ignored the latter part of her remarks.

"Oh, but some of them were awfully good, you know. There was an awfully jolly one of some rocks and things. I say, Miss Lorton," he went on, getting rather red, "I wish you'd let me have one of them."

Here was an awkward state of things. Frank seemed to be "revealing unsuspected depths of feeling," like the private tutor in a well-known poem: he had developed a taste for artistic culture, but his way of showing it was not calculated to make his companion feel comfortable.

"Really, Mr. Dalton," she said, "I have nothing at all worth giving away."

Frank seized his opportunity. He screwed his courage to "popping" point, and made a mighty effort.

"Well," he said, "if you won't give me that, there's something else I wish you would give me."

Ursula looked at him in bewilderment. What could he mean?

“Yes, I’m not rotting, you know. I want *you*, Miss Lorton. I shall have lots of coin, you know, so that’ll be all right. I want to marry you, Ursula.”

If Ursula was puzzled before, she was now simply struck dumb. This was something she had never dreamed of suspecting; and she felt a little bit indignant with this great hulking boy for taking her undeserved toleration in this manner. She stood still for a while in mute surprise. At last she spoke.

“I’m afraid,” she said, “you don’t understand what you’re talking about.”

“Oh yes, I do,” said Frank, moving forward again, for Ursula’s pause had enabled the rest of the party to come pretty near them. “Oh yes, I do. It’ll be all right, you know. Nobody will object.”

The bland self-satisfaction of the young gentleman’s tone was intensely nettling to Ursula.

“I’m afraid somebody will,” she said, struggling against a strong temptation to speak with severity. “Take care: hadn’t we better stop? This is very slippery ground.”

The last remark, though it would bear a metaphorical interpretation, was meant literally. The rocks were getting very sea-weedy, and the foothold very uncertain. But Frank held on his way in proud contempt of such trifles.

"That doesn't matter," he said, "I won't let you tumble. And nobody *will* object, you know. At least the gov'nor won't, and no one else matters."

"No one, Mr. Dalton?" Ursula was beginning to enjoy the situation. This absurd confidence deserved the punishment it was going to get.

"Why, no, as long as we are agreed."

"Perhaps;—but—are we?"

Frank faced round. He saw the smile breaking out on his beloved's face, and a new and awful thought occurred to him. But no! it was impossible.

"Why, you're never going to refuse me," he said incredulously.

But Ursula was merciless. "That's the very thing," she replied with a mischievous little curtsy: "You do me too great an honour, Mr. Dalton, and I really couldn't think of accepting it."

Frank's countenance fell. "I say, you know, don't. You think I don't mean it, but I do. Ursula, you've no idea how keen I am. You're the only girl that ever—oh con—— Damn!"

Splash! The lover's foot slipped on the seaweed in the midst of his impassioned address; he staggered, and suddenly descended backwards ignominiously into a pool; and hence his most untimely objurgation. To make his position

worse, Tantivy, excited by the display of water-works attending his fall, came galloping on either side of the prostrate hero, yapping hilariously and snapping at his trousers. It was too much for Ursula, who broke into a fit of laughter, with an irresistible ripple of triumph in it.

Slowly he picked himself out of the pool, dripping, chilly, and miserably conscious that he had been made ridiculous in the eyes of his mistress. To crown his shame, Mr. Dalton's voice sounded across the intervening rocks—

“What's that boy doing? Bless us, what a figure he is! Come, be off home with you, my young man, and change your clothes.”

“You had better go, Mr. Dalton,” said Ursula, controlling her voice enough to speak, though with some difficulty,—“and—I'm sorry that your hopes should have been buried in a watery grave.”

CHAPTER XIII.

URSULA'S BIRTHDAY.

“Where are the winged words? Lost in the air.
Where the fresh flower of youth and glory? Gone!
The strength of well-knit limbs? Brought low by care.
Wealth? Plundered. None possess but God alone.”

Gregory of Nazianzen.

It was Ursula's birthday. For twenty-one years to-day she had lived to brighten the lives of a tiny fraction of humanity peopling a still tinier segment, comparatively speaking, of the whole sum of things,—the spot which from time to time she had called her home. It seems a modest achievement, but how many of us can say as much? Not that Ursula said, or even thought, anything about it at all; only she did not feel any stings of conscience on the subject.

At breakfast she was presented by the sisters with a gold watch and chain which Aunt Joan had paid for alone. But then Miss Hilda's share in the ceremony was discharged in no slipshod or perfunctory style. She was good enough to

meet her responsibility as the elder without the least hesitation in the world, and cheerfully undertook unasked the trying duty of the presentation, throwing in gratis, as it were, a few inspiring and original remarks by way of an informal complimentary address.

"For it is an epoch in your life, my dear," said she, after reminding Ursula how entirely she was beholden to her, Miss Blunsden, for daily sustenance, bodily and spiritual; "a day to be spent in prayer and fasting, in meditation and contemplation, in mortifying the flesh and nourishing the soul. Think, my dear child; from this day forward you will have to face the task of forming your own opinions!"

"Well," observed Miss Joanna, looking into the teapot, and snapping the lid viciously, "I don't suppose she is ever likely to want you or me to form them for her."

"Be silent, dear Joanna, please. My memory is not so short as yours, dearest, and I can remember exactly how I felt when all the cares and griefs of womanhood first burst upon my girlish vision." Aunt Hilda sighed, and looked sentimental.

"'Teach me rather to forget,'" muttered her sister, helping herself to bacon and eggs; "however, if there's anything to cry about we may as well get over it as soon as possible."

“Anything to cry about!” laughed Ursula; “why, I couldn’t cry now if I tried; every one is so kind, and I feel so happy, and grateful. But I know what you mean, Aunt Hilda,” she went on, “and I don’t intend to take the day just like every other one, you know, in spite of that wicked Aunt Joan.” The two young people hugged each other affectionately, and thus was the wind again taken out of Miss Hilda’s sails, to use a vulgar nautical parable. What would have been that lady’s horror and amazement if she had guessed that her young charge had already begun to have a will of her own a considerable number of years before the attainment of her legal majority! That such was the shocking fact can, however, be at once averred with confidence. Most young ladies have more in them than appears at first sight,—though, indeed, the opposite turns out not unfrequently to be the case, especially where that first sight may be considered satisfactory enough in an æsthetic sense. Socrates is a classical precedent for this divorce between internal and external beauty in a man, nor is the anomalous union between a vivacious manner and a sluggish intelligence absolutely unknown in this wide-awake age. But, whether Ursula be taken to illustrate the rule or the exception, let it be here publicly advertised that her freshness was not

the slow result of consuming the strong meat supplied by manuals of deportment. Her nature was all of a piece, clear and sound as a bell all through. Such as pure mother's-milk had made it, so had it remained; and its growth was a natural development undisturbed by artificial twists or forced excrescences; in short, a tolerably correct estimate of Hercules was possible after a cursory inspection of his footprint.

Aunt Hilda's sermon about epochs, so happily cut short and frustrated by Joanna and Ursula between them, would have been mere wasted breath, had it been delivered. But though no one doubtless could have been more gratified than Miss Blunsden to be convinced of the superfluosness of administering such maxims by the fact that they were already duly appreciated, the artificial manner in which the conversation had been diverted from her topic did not apparently meet with that lady's approval. Whether it was that she had her doubts about Ursula's sagacity, or that she was a prey to the sudden indisposition which would malignantly attack her at similar junctures to the present, she lost her voice to all intents and purposes during the remainder of the meal, and except for an occasional sigh, or sharp indrawing of breath, as if she were heroically suppressing a cry of anguish, she maintained a reserved, not to say

stolid, demeanour as long as Ursula stayed in the room. Under the circumstances there was only one thing to be done, and the dining-room was soon evacuated by the frivolous members of the family. Up-stairs things looked more cheerful. There was a bright fire in the little boudoir, and almost every vase and vessel which could by any means be utilised for the purpose had its bouquet of hot-house flowers. The girl knew whose thoughtfulness had planned this sweet-savoured welcome. Who but Aunt Joan would have risen earlier than her wont on purpose to arrange the offering which she must have secreted somewhere in the house overnight? She noticed, too, some simple presents from one or two humble friends. There was a mute assurance about such gifts that put them above the suspicion of unworthy motive. It was all one whether she were rich or poor, a nameless outcast or the envied possessor of interest and patronage, the tenderness of the givers would have been the same either way. She looked out at the blue sky above; at the piled and battle-mented line of the horizon, the cloudy strongholds against which the sea must surely be surging over there in the distance; at the sea itself, smooth where she saw it far out, while the bands of gold upon its surface broadened even while she looked into one wide robe of glory, and

the sails put off in a moment their dull hues, and flashed out silvery as dove's wings. Onward spread the glow, illuminating the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, as far as the eye could reach, with its genial wealth of light. Every surface touched by it in its advance seemed instantly to teem with life, and for a space even the commonest things shone radiant. Ursula doubted if there were any shade so impenetrable as to resist the searching flood; the very bowels of the earth must disclose their secrets, nor could even that blacker darkness which shrouds men's hearts be left unprobed. Auspicious sunshine! And yet, had the sun's face been hidden and the sky beclouded, Ursula would have been well pleased. Every mood of Nature was alike auspicious to her, and she would fall into accord with each change as easily as skilled musicians modulate from one key into another. None but untilled human clods, however, can fail to be moved by a glimpse of fine weather at a time of year when such glimpses are rare.

In the little piece of road which was visible from the window two butcher-boys were engaged in feats of dexterity and daring, while a knot of children whose Christmas holidays were not yet over left their skipping, and gathered close round the truant acrobats. A dog was sniffing the

meat-troughs which had been laid aside by their careless guardians at the edge of the pavement. He was a fat, well-liking cur, and evidently meant to purloin the meat merely as an excellent practical joke, being inspired thereto by the seasonable hilarity that was in the air, and not because he might otherwise be dinnerless. A man with a wooden leg stumped round the corner, and Ursula was just wondering whether he would fling away his stick, and take a turn at the skipping-rope, when there was a rustle at the door. Ursula turned round, and saw Aunt Joan enter softly. She closed the door behind her in a cautious and almost nervous manner, and stood a moment looking downwards with a strange air of indecision. Ursula saw that she held something in her hand, but kept it partially concealed in the folds of her dress, as if she were half-afraid of showing it. Brief as was the elder woman's embarrassment it was the first sign of constraint that had ever appeared to weaken the relation between these two. Thus much the girl divined at a glance; and ignorant whether this were some mere passing shock, or a pang that was to leave its lifelong ineradicable sting,—ignorant alike of the cause of her new woe and its consequence—she sank down upon the window-settle under the weight of pain with a low cry. It smote upon Joanna's heart with the might of an

irresistible appeal. All the great capacity for loving within her made immediate and loyal answer. She raised her head, and looked at Ursula with eyes full of tears. Then she advanced, and took the girl's hand.

"Dear Ursula, it is all so sad."

What did she mean? Ursula remained gazing in front of her with eyes bereft of vision. She felt suddenly dazed, and it was easier to think than speak. But, some kind instinct coming to her aid, she took quietly the hand outstretched to her in this, as it had been in every other difficulty as far back as she could remember, and tried hard to steady her thoughts.

So she set foot upon the trackless future, clinging bravely to her only chance of safe-conduct through it. Good ship! Cut adrift from all moorings else, hold fast to this last strand in the cable that still keeps you at fair anchorage within the port where are the habitations of men, homes lovely and beloved. That link once chafed asunder, there will be nothing to hinder you from being rapt clean away from human succour and sympathy, till even the very memory of such things dies in you, and you go to pieces at last, a seared and out-worn hulk through ceaseless tossing on the waste waters of apathy.

"Let us sit down here together."

Ursula heard, and complied automatically.

They sat down on the sofa, and Joanna put her arms tenderly about her charge.

There are seasons when life's stages of transition follow closely upon each other in such mad pell-mell that the soul recoils amazed and baffled from the effort to conceive vicissitudes so rapid and various.

The sun's rays had been streaming into the room just now when Ursula entered it. Just now!—God! How recent, and yet how phantasmally remote, it seemed, separated from the present by such a crowded interval of experience. Where now were those dainty and brilliant hues, those thousand tiny sparkles emitted by each ornament and polished surface in response to the fructifying beams? A grey haze pervaded the place, permeating everything with chilly neutral tint. Ursula shivered.

But Joanna's voice reassured her. "Dear child," it said, "I have always dreaded this day, and not more for your sake, I believe, than for my own." The voice trembled a little, and went on in a firmer tone. "How you will take what I am going to tell you I do not know, but a fear has often come over me—though heaven knows how earnestly I have tried to repress it—that this secret was destined to come between us, and—oh, Ursula!—drive us apart as soon as it should be known. Therefore promise me, dear,

before I go farther, and out of pity for this weak fancy of mine, if you like, that you will never be persuaded into leaving me wilfully or carelessly against my wish without the deepest consideration of the circumstances, and that at any rate, however widely we may be severed through no fault of our own, I may still count upon your undying love and prayers for me as you may upon mine."

The light came again into Ursula's eyes as she threw her arms about Aunt Joan's neck, and in a choking voice promised to observe this covenant. "And now," she said, almost smiling, as she lay still, her pale cheek against her friend's, "go on with what you have to tell me, dear; for, whatever it may be, the worst is past."

"We must be nearer to each other in love than ever," replied Joanna. "What is the use of friendship if it cannot many times over outweigh kindred?"

"Ah, that is just what I think. And I don't forget that you are my friend as well as my relation, Aunt Joan. I don't intend ever to call you anything else, and yet I believe few sisters can be so dear to each other as we are."

"That is well, dearest. I, too, have held fast the same thought all along, and only waited to have it confirmed once more by your lips. Well, then, there is no need to delay farther, as one

would have to do with weak folks. For both of us the task is easier. The time has come when we must each resign our claim of kinship upon the other, and recognise only the simple bond of love ; for there is neither more or less than that between us, Ursula."

She paused, and there was no sound in the room but the ticking of the clock in the corner, and the sputter of the fire among the coals. Ursula's silence alarmed her, and she would have eaten her words to have been spared the piteous sight of the girl's blanched cheeks and drooping eyelids. She bent quickly and kissed the pale upturned face ; then recovering herself went on doggedly :

"It is about seventeen years ago that I was
"working alone one evening, Hilda having gone
"out, when I first heard your name, and saw
"your poor mother lead you into our drawing-
"room at Brighton. You were both thinly clad,
"and looked pinched and exhausted, but even
"the servant recognised the tokens of gentle
"birth and nurture in Mrs. Lorton, and admitted
"her at once. Directly she opened her mouth
"I knew her to be a woman of culture and
"refinement, and when she told me that she
"had been a governess like myself, and being
"in great destitution had come to me after a
"fruitless day spent in search of employment

“elsewhere, prudence and inclination united in
“urging me to accept her offered assistance. I
“shall never forget how the dear soul burst out
“crying after I told her that we could easily
“find room in the house for both mother and
“child. ‘My own happiness is gone,’ she said,
“‘and for my own sake I would as soon die in
“the workhouse as anywhere else; but I feel I
“must do the best I can for this sweet innocent.
“For her sake I bless you from my heart.’ Of
“course I did the best I could to comfort your
“mother, telling her that Hilda would never
“forgive me if I was to treat any claimant on
“our good offices with discourtesy. Then I took
“you both down-stairs, and gave you something
“to eat. Afterwards, while a room was being
“prepared for you, your mother sat down with
“me again before the fire, and told me all about
“herself, rocking you to sleep on her lap. That
“story—partly told then, and farther explained
“at various times later—you shall hear briefly.”

Ursula stirred slightly, and her lips trembled, but she said nothing.

“Your mother came of a good English family,
“a family possessing the means to do much for
“its members. But she was unhappy at home;
“she was the only daughter, and there was no one
“to attend to her after her mother’s death. Then
“her father married again, and her eldest brother,

“a pushing barrister, got her into his power, and
“tried to force upon her a lover of his own
“choosing. She was not less spirited and head-
“strong than he, however, and after many bitter
“quarrels she fled. Five or six years before she
“came to us at Brighton she had been teaching
“in a wealthy family at a certain colonial city.
“She was well treated, and indeed always looked
“back to that time as the happiest part of her
“life. Her relations found out after a while
“what had become of her; but they never
“made the least effort to heal the breach, and
“she knew that their injured pride would not
“allow them to acknowledge her again. The
“brother has since risen to one of the highest
“positions in his profession, but she made me
“promise never to communicate with him, or
“even reveal his name to you. It was on some
“excursion into the country to pass a holiday
“that she met for the first time her future
“husband, your father. By what artifices he
“cajoled her into marrying him is a mystery
“upon which I can throw no light. He was
“a well-educated man, and probably her defence-
“less position, disowned by her natural pro-
“tectors, and thrown upon her resources among
“strangers—all this may have had something to
“do with it. His cunning adroitness conquered,
“and it was reserved for her to discover after she

“ had been so lightly won, when farther trouble
“ to conceal the fact was unnecessary, that she
“ was the miserable bride of a criminal who had
“ successfully evaded justice. Yes, Ursula ; ter-
“ rible as it is for me to say it and for you to
“ hear it, your mother found herself yoked for
“ life to a swindler, with no prospect before him
“ but tardy vengeance on his misdeeds. The
“ blow was more than she could bear, and when
“ his reckless ill-usage of you both drove her
“ away from him, her delicate frame already held
“ within it the seeds of the disease which was to
“ kill her. Had he shown any disposition to
“ amend under her influence, she would not
“ have allowed the shadow of his dishonoured
“ life to stand between them permanently. Of
“ this she has often assured me, and in such
“ terms as I could not but believe. But even
“ this last hope was denied her, and she felt
“ that her duty to her innocent offspring must
“ be preserved at the cost of her duty to its
“ guilty parent. Her one thought was for her
“ child, that you might grow up pure and free
“ from taint. Her last days with us were tran-
“ quil, if they were not happy. She was inde-
“ fatigable in helping us as long as her waning
“ strength lasted, never accepting anything from
“ us but simple hospitality, and the barest neces-
“ saries of maintenance. Few women that I have

“met have been so bountifully qualified by nature
“to instruct others. She was an accomplished
“linguist, and you inherit something of her
“talent for drawing. To crown all, she had the
“noblest spirit of perseverance, and we had no
“idea how ill she was till the end was very near.
“I have always thought that her devoted toil
“hastened her death, but she would beg me not
“to hinder her whenever I remonstrated with
“her for doing too much. ‘You must let me
“work,’ she used to say, ‘it will not be for
“long, and idleness is a torture to me because it
“gives me time to think.’ I can look back now
“on the intimacy of those few months, short as
“it was, with unalloyed pleasure. It was a
“comfort to her to know that you would be our
“dearest care after her death, and she it was who
“first taught you to call us your aunts, Hilda con-
“sidering that to be the best way of accounting to
“others for your appearance in our household.

“And now,” continued Joanna, drying her eyes, and kissing Ursula, “I have told you
“everything just as I promised your dear mother
“on her death-bed that I would. But before I
“leave you to think over the sad past alone, my
“child, I must give you these two packets,—one
“containing your mother’s greeting for to-day,
“written by her own hand; the other a jewel
“which belonged to her, and which you are to

“wear for her sake. Take them, my darling, and
“be comforted.”

So saying, she strained her young charge to her breast in another long embrace, and withdrew noiselessly from the room.

Slowly, painfully, the minutes went by while Ursula sat motionless. There was a confused humming in her ears, and anguish smote into her very soul with exceeding bitterness. The congealed fountain of sorrow was broken up at last, however, and burying her aching head in the cushion she found relief in tears. Gradually the tempest subsided into calm, selfish grief giving way to the compassionate remembrance of her mother's sufferings, and thankfulness that she herself had been so happily spared. Her own girlhood had been comparatively unclouded, and if the future was less settled than she had supposed, at least no one could rob her of this consoling retrospect. She must make up her mind to be less of a burden than ever to the two good women who had brought her up; she must brace herself to endure,—nay, rather she must court—circumstances and employments which before she would have avoided as uncongenial. She must not be unworthy of the mother who condescended to mean drudgery for her even while the hand of death was tightening its hold.

A sudden flash of colour dazzled her as she opened the first packet. Ursula had never seen so magnificent a gaud. Her mother must indeed have set great store by it to resist the temptation of exchanging it for the multitude of useful things which she had so urgently needed. She took it up tenderly, noting the elaborate workmanship and chaste design. Then she slipped it into the bosom of her dress in order to examine the other packet.

It was a sealed envelope, and was addressed in faint and delicate characters, "To my dear Ursula, to be given to her on her twenty-first birthday, if she lives to see it ; otherwise, to be destroyed unopened."

Ursula pressed her lips to this superscription, and reverently broke the seal. The letter contained full confirmation of all that Joanna had told her, adding no fresh particulars to the writer's history, but testifying in a few simple and heartfelt expressions of gratitude to the unbounded sympathy and tenderness which mother and child had experienced from Aunt Joan and her sister.

" Never wound their kind hearts by "speaking to them under any colder names than "those by which you have hitherto been accustomed to know them," so ran the letter ; "there "is no one else under heaven to whom you owe "anything in comparison. The consecration of a

“life to their service—though it may at some
“future time involve leaving them to seek your
“fortune in the world—would not be more than
“they can justly claim. . . . As for your father,
“I can only bid you pray for him. It is unlikely
“you will ever see him; the fear of what awaits
“him in England will prevent his returning, and
“he is doomed to end his days in some foreign
“hiding-place. Probably he will long ago have
“found means to console himself for our loss, if
“he should be alive when this reaches you. I
“will not defend myself to you for deserting
“him. Do not blame me for this, my dear
“daughter; I would have done anything to
“shield you from the knowledge of such infamy
“as must have been mine, had I remained with
“him. Still, I cannot bear, with death so close
“at hand, to quite shut him out from his child’s
“influence. Should he ever, therefore, come to
“you, my darling, humbly grieving for the past,
“and showing the least desire to make such satis-
“faction as is possible, do not refuse your help.
“I loved him once, Ursula,—God knows how
“truly, and how much it costs me to say so
“now. If I have wronged him, then, not rightly
“perceiving what to do, or how to serve you both,
“be yours the privilege of redressing the injury.”

The letter concluded with many fervent out-
pourings of the mother’s anxiety for her daughter’s

happiness, expressing the conviction that she would at least not be destitute of that best form of pleasure which comes from contributing to the happiness of others, and begging her to keep this last memento of a fond parent as well as those which she might already possess.

Wistfully conning these appeals and injunctions of the dead, Ursula mastered her emotion, and sank into a deep and passionless reverie. Her nature had that morning received a great shock,—a shock which was in a measure to mould her character afresh. She was softened, but not crushed or broken. In one short hour she had altered so far to become tractable, and know her own dependence. And now that she was no longer the plaything of contrary forces she became imbued with sudden strength. The powers of good had triumphed.

Her old pride was shaken, and she set about reviewing her late experiences from an entirely novel standpoint. Beginning with the time when she first came to Burnport, she searched her memory rigidly, changing or in some way modifying nearly all her previous impressions, till she reached the present, and reflected how much harder it would have been, supposing Frank Dalton had been an acceptable lover, and she were obliged to tell him all this miserable story before it would be possible for her to listen to

his addresses. The thought made her glad, not that she had repulsed him,—she could not have done otherwise,—but that her refusal had cost her nothing. Had he been different, and she more favourably disposed, it might have been necessary to give him up after this revelation. Yes, she would not deceive herself, this was no situation in which she could refuse to look at an ugly fact, and it was true enough that she had thrown away what many people would have considered an excellent chance of retrieving her fortunes almost at the very moment when she was discovering her lack of resources. For, though Frank was lazy and good for nothing, he was rich, and perhaps he was not so very much more impressed with the folly for him of attempting to do any work than sagacious observers who knew what he would come in for on his father's death. She could not believe, however, that Joanna would have been gratified to hear that she had accepted Frank as her lover, knowing that there was very little cordiality between them, and so she had nothing at all to reproach her for having acted as she did. There was only one thing about it which she regretted, and that was the supercilious manner in which she had dismissed the young gentleman. It is all very well for a lady to decline the flattering attentions of an adorer, but when she does not

take the trouble to control her exultation at an accident to the luckless swain's dignity, real or imaginary, he surely has some reason to complain. So, at least, thought Ursula, now that the affair presented itself in a serious light. She resolved, therefore, to atone for her rudeness to the insulted youth by engaging him in conversation on some future occasion, and healing his wounded self-esteem by such small marks of friendly consideration as might occur to her.

It was characteristic of the change which had thus suddenly been initiated in the girl's disposition that the thought of Frank should lead her to think—as perhaps she had never done consciously before—of Arnold. Contrast has often as much to do with the succession of our thoughts as similarity. Arnold and Frank were the only two specimens of mankind in her own generation with whom she had held anything approaching to familiar intercourse. The fragmentary conversations which had served to fill up the intervals on those rare occasions when she went to a dance did not count with Ursula. She loved dancing, like every healthy and active young creature, for its own sake, and on the whole preferred a somewhat mature partner to a youthful one, if there was not much difference between them in point of activity and supple-

ness. One of the weak points in Arnold was that he had never learned to dance as if he enjoyed that form of diversion. He could get through a waltz tolerably, and always felt that he ought to be thankful for a miraculous escape if the evening passed without any especially flagrant piece of awkwardness on his part. He had congratulated himself more than once during his Christmas festivity at Oakleigh that Ursula was not present to witness his Terpsichorean performances, being apprehensive whether she might not lean to the conclusion that a polished floor was a less suitable arena for his eccentric gambols than the sawdust of a circus.

To tell the truth, however, the thought that he might be amusing in the character of a dancer had never entered Ursula's head. In her eyes he had hitherto been little more than a simple, honest fellow,—one who had generous impulses, too, and was not without a leavening of mother-wit. The Daltons were fond of him; she could see that by the way they attended to him during his convalescence. It was a pity he should have had that accident,—he had such a pleasant grave face,—and the scar would not be quite concealed by his hair. He seemed to behave very nicely to Grace. Ursula was glad her friend had someone stronger than her weakling of a brother to depend on. Arnold Robur and Frank Dalton!

It was a wide field, truly, that was covered by the antithesis.

Meanwhile, the object of her thoughts was down-stairs with Aunt Joan. He had called in the hope of seeing Ursula herself, and hearing her thank him with her own lips for the hamper of flowers and fruit which had just arrived by his orders from Oakleigh to grace the birthday.

His disappointment at the intelligence that Ursula was not well, and wished to be quiet, was so apparent that Aunt Joan took pity on him, and invited him to come in and have a chat with her.

"The fact is," she said, "this has not been an altogether untroubled day for our dear child. She has had some very sad news which it was impossible for us to defer; but she bears it bravely, and I hope will be none the worse."

Arnold was startled. "I am very sorry," he said, without evincing any curiosity to hear more.

"Yes," replied Joanna, "I knew you would be, and I do not keep this wretched business from you because I think it would make any difference in your feelings, except, perhaps, to intensify them. It is very hard," she went on, picking up her knitting and examining the stitches, "when poor weak innocent people have to suffer for the guilty."

"That's the worst part of crime, I suppose," observed Arnold, at the same time internally marvelling that there should be any connexion between such a topic and his pure young mistress.

"And the part the criminal never thinks of till it is too late," acquiesced Joanna. "But I imagine most of us who can boast a pedigree have got used to the fact of having had rogues in the family."

Her tone amused Arnold. "I never heard that the Borgias allowed their spirits to be much affected by the foibles of their amiable kith and kin," he said gaily. "As long as kleptomania and arson don't run in a family I don't believe in the power of one rascal to blight the existence of his whole posterity; though, I grant you, the notion is an excellent one for the purposes of romance."

"What's that I hear about romance?" cried a sweet voice, and Miss Hilda sailed into the room, looking the picture of that ease and contentment which only the very best conscience to be had, or the entire absence of any, can produce.

"Well, now, I declare!" she exclaimed, holding up a delicate little hand at Arnold as he rose to greet her, "two young people like you to be talking about romance when you are left alone together! For shame, for shame!"

"Would you like to join in the conversation

too, Miss Blunsden?" asked Arnold; "I can assure you we are not at all afraid of finding a third person unsociable."

He could not help being rather acutely conscious while he spoke, however, of the fact that some third persons were decidedly less welcome than others.

"What a grudge Miss Hilda's progenitors must be settling against posterity!" he mused, as he seized an early opportunity to retire.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SURPRISE.

“Here, without pyre or bier,
Light Love was buried here,
Alas, his grave was wide and deep enough ;
Thrice, with averted head,
We cast dust on the dead,
And left him to his rest. An end of Love.”

Andrew Lang.

“AY, ay, a lying, precocious imp of Satan it is, to be sure,” growled Mr. Dalton, coming into the sitting-room occupied by his family at Burnport just as Arnold was examining a highly-coloured and singularly explicit representation of the god Cupid which adorned the wall. “You’ll admit that there never was a more impudent, mundane brat, eh?” he continued, delighted with this opportunity for a tirade.

“Well, it is a trifle gross, certainly,” replied Arnold with the artful intention of giving his host the rein.

“Gross!” cried Mr. Dalton, snapping eagerly at the word, with the suggestion of a terrier

finding something to worry : “ gross ! d’ye mean to tell me it isn’t just the truest imitation of nature possible ? D’ye mean to inform me that real love is one bit more decent, more temperate, better behaved, or in a general way more respectable than that naked devilkin over there ? Why, man, I would have you to know——”

“ I quite agree with you,” interrupted the other, smiling at the old gentleman’s pugnacity.

Mr. Dalton was aghast at this perfidious way of cutting short the controversy ; he was by no means attracted by such onesided reciprocity, as some Hibernian once phrased it.

“ Come now, Arnold Robur,” said he, “ it’s too bad of you to turn round, and pretend to agree with me. But I see your quibble,” he exclaimed suddenly, as a happy inspiration seized him. “ You are going to say that you don’t believe real love is any better than it should be ; and that the picture, having nothing ideal about it, is true enough to life so far as it goes.”

“ Well, Mr. Dalton, suppose I mean that, have you anything to say to it ? ”

“ Nay, nay, my friend, but you do mean it without any supposing. Now I’ll give you a piece of advice,—don’t you believe all that stuff about ideals. Why, I knew a man once—he was a farmer up in the North—who went in for raising an ideal mangold. His crop always beat

those of the other farmers in his part of the world, but that wasn't enough for him. He didn't care about coming up to other folks' expectations, he must come up to his own. Well, does he ever do it? Not he. On he went year after year, never getting within recognisable distance of that mangold in his head,—on his brain, you know,—and at last he ruined himself in patent drainage and manures. No, no; mark my word, ideals are a breed of white elephant with quite a special gift for making fools and idiots of their owners."

How this sound maxim might have been further illustrated by references to a fertile experience can only be surmised, as Grace at that moment entered, and, observing that the two gentlemen did not seem inclined to continue the conversation in which they were engaged, said unsuspiciously—

"To change the subject, whatever it is, Ursula can come to dinner, after all, as she has got over her headache."

"That's a good job," remarked Mr. Dalton, who had developed a great fancy for that young lady from his short acquaintance with her. "Ursula Lorton is a girl after my own heart. She must have something unpractical about her, I suppose, like the rest of her sex, but I haven't been able to find it yet. There, there, my dear,"

he added, relaxing somewhat as his daughter shook her finger at him playfully, "Arnold Robur here has been 'drawing' me, as you call it, and I'm soured for the evening."

Nevertheless he was prevailed upon to make himself thoroughly amiable by the time Ursula made her appearance. She came with Miss Hilda, who had a bath-chair specially retained for her use on such occasions.

"The child actually walked, my dear Mrs. Dalton," explained the Mother Superior; "she says she prefers it to having another chair," and the company were then edified with a fervent eulogy of that unsociable vehicle's advantages.

Every attempt made by Arnold to have some talk with Ursula proved abortive. At dinner they were separated by the entire length of the table, and afterwards whenever he began to move in her direction he was recalled by the voice of his hostess, or by some enquiry on the part of Miss Hilda, invariably leading up to a lengthy disquisition in which he was required to join by delivering himself of expressive monosyllabic comments at short intervals. These hindrances were placed so unremittently in his way that eventually he resigned himself to them as something inevitable, and tried not to envy Frank, whose conversation Ursula appeared to find vastly interesting, to judge by her attentive face.

Arnold watched them intently, wondering what topic they could possibly have in common. Do what he would, the thought persistently occurred that she was purposely avoiding him. It was absurd, childish, however, to suppose that she could really care for Frank. And yet, why had she been too ill to see anyone—or, at least, Arnold himself—this morning, and yet was well enough to enjoy Frank's society now? And why, too, had Joanna stayed away? Did she know anything about this? Perhaps Ursula had come not expecting to meet her unwelcome caller. Nonsense!—Hark! some one was asking him to play. Who? He rose with a confused sense of making some mistake, stammering out, "Oh, nothing of the sort; pray don't mention it; I should be so much obliged," to the amazement of Miss Hilda, who was in the middle of one of her portentous rigmroles, and was congratulating herself upon her listener.

It was Mrs. Dalton who had invited him to perform, and as he passed her on his way to the piano she whispered, "Something lively, you know; what makes you so dull this evening?"

Arnold opened the instrument desperately. He could not see anything he knew among the pieces of music that lay scattered about, and he was unwilling to trust his memory.

Glancing at Ursula, however, he saw that she had deserted Frank, and taken a chair a little apart from the others, evidently wishing to enjoy the music without interruption. Mightily reassured he sat down at once,—so easily is the interval between courage and faintness traversed—and burst into a jubilant and intricate strain. There was a feverish intensity about it which chimed in well with his present humour, its spirit seeming, as he played, to grow almost identical with his own. The ups and downs of these weary days were figured in its rapid and capricious alternations; he saw in it a more intelligible reflection of his hopes and fears than could have been expressed in words. Considering that the Muse of Harmony—whatever scandals may be whispered about her august sisters—is held to have an undoubted right to the patent of her inventions, owing nothing for her ideas to any alien source, the unskilled in such mysteries can but exclaim, in paraphrase of a well-worn epigram, “O Nature, O Music, which of you two is the greater plagiarist?”

Perhaps the hardest part of falling in love, from the man’s point of view, is the preliminary difficulty of carrying to the other person concerned any notion of the feelings she inspires in at least one heart. Now a cynical opinion is frequently expressed, and sometimes believed,

that there is less danger of this obstacle to courtship than of that opposite fruitful source of unhappiness, the morbid haste with which some females are prone to construe mere civilities as acts of peculiar homage. But, though it is unfortunately true that ladies belonging to the vulgar leisured class do employ their sickly, undeveloped imaginations on trash of this description, it is one of the delightful idiosyncrasies of their sex that the talent for discovering admirers in simple acquaintances makes them no whit quicker at understanding the modest overtures of genuine attachment than their less gifted and—it is to be hoped—more numerous inferiors. For the time has come when a great and increasing proportion of women are making up their minds that they must dry their eyes, and set to work,—not against, but on equal terms with men. Nor does this revolutionary defection only touch the interests of those whom it has led astray. It actually imposes a larger demand on the lachrymal resources of the dwindling fraction of superiors which yet remains faithful to the respectable traditions of Park Lane and Grosvenor Square, increasing the average capacity of each tear-bottle kept by Etruscan dame or damsel in that stately region to the dimensions of a family water-butt. Who can have any sympathy for a movement not less selfish in its tyranny over

others than depraving in its influence on its actual supporters?

Ursula had something else to think about, however, and never troubled her head as to whether the freshness of her beauty had anything to do with the regard which her friends paid her. The fact had not escaped Arnold's notice, and in his saner moments he would often impress upon himself the warning that she looked upon him as nothing more than an agreeable acquaintance, at the utmost. For a time, while he could not be satisfied with such a relation, he consented to bear with it as the necessary prologue to fuller communion; he could even feel acute pleasure at having made good this advantage, slight as it was. But ever since that conversation with Armitage on the night of the "accident" he had been growing less cheerful in his resignation. Why should his hope stand still? he asked himself. Every day made the negative privilege which he enjoyed more painfully insufficient. Casting about for any means to familiarise the object of his devotion—delicately and gradually, but not doubtfully—with the consciousness of it, he soon began to lose self-control, forming impressions which bore a striking family resemblance to his wishes. He became fidgety, and his mind took long excursions to inaccessible regions. He was a prey to

all the terrors of uneasiness. His natural consideration for other people deserted him. General conversation was the spark that set his irritable temper aflame. Books and company were alike distasteful. Leisure was torment, and yet he could do nothing. Fearing solitude, he feared society more. Certainty of the worst would be preferable to the protracted agony of suspense, and he resolved to rush upon his fate the very next day, if possible.

But few riders can keep a firm seat on the bare back of a restive and untrained ambition for long without a tumble. Arnold had wound up his performance at the piano, and was acknowledging Mrs. Dalton's approving, though somewhat erratic, criticism, when Grace came up to ask him to accompany a song for Ursula. "You will be able to manage it better than I can," said she; "it's quite new to me, and I never could read music at sight a bit."

Ursula was at the piano, and beckoned to him with a smile. "Look, she's calling you," whispered Grace, and turned to talk to Miss Blunsden.

Arnold's blood tingled with delight at this fresh sign of encouragement. It was clear that Ursula had not been avoiding him. She had been pertinaciously bored by Frank,—that was all; and now that she was free to attend to anyone else she had summoned Arnold to her

side. Here was a chance for one of those rare strokes of passionate diplomacy for which he was always preparing.

Coming totally by surprise, this piece of good fortune intoxicated the young man, robbing him of his wits. Vanity took the place of his late jealousy ; he advanced confidently. Ursula was extricating the particular song she wished to sing from a bundle of others, and he meandered about the key-board till she was ready.

“Here it is,” cried she, spreading the piece of music open on the desk before him, and indicating with her hand some difficult feature in the accompaniment. For a moment Arnold’s eyes rested where she pointed,——then, with an inarticulate gasp, he fell back pale and powerless as a corpse. Panic made him quake in every limb, his teeth chattered, he could not swallow, his head swam, and a deadly nausea came over him.

What had happened ? They all crowded round him suggesting reasons for this attack, and remedies. Some thought it was ague, while Mrs. Dalton inclined to a suggestion from Aunt Hilda that the symptoms were those of paralysis. “In which case,” observed that considerate spinster, “nothing could be better than for you to send one of your servants to ask Joanna for a bottle of the light medicine which I always keep for such emergencies.”

Meanwhile Arnold, whose head Ursula was sup-

porting, recovered himself with a supreme effort, and, Mr. Dalton appearing with some brandy, he was made to take a dose of the stimulant, and lie down afterwards on the sofa for a little.

“That hole in your head is not such a trifle as you want to persuade us, my lad,” said the kindly host; “you’re in too much of a hurry to get well, let me tell you. No more orgies and late hours till you’re strong again, mind that.”

“No, no; I have been in too great a hurry, as you say,” muttered Arnold, trying to smile; “but I’m all right now, and should like to get home and go to bed, if you’ll excuse my taking myself off in this unceremonious way.”

So saying he took leave hastily of the rest of the party, and found his way down-stairs on Mr. Dalton’s arm, which was not withdrawn till the hotel was reached.

A letter was waiting for him. As he took it he noticed that it had been posted in the town and bore the local mark. A circular, probably. The gas on the landing showed him his name on the envelope written in an angular scrawl.

Doubtless an announcement of some clearance sale of drapery, or an application for left-off clothes. What a waste of time, stamps, ink, and paper must be the price of gratifying this taste for speculative advertising!

He threw himself, dressed as he was, upon his bed, still holding the letter in his hand. What

was best to be done ? He tried to think over the events of the evening, but his mind refused obedience, and harped persistently upon indifferent subjects. This advertising, now ; there must be something in it. People professed not to be influenced by advertisements, and yet they must be. Newspapers owed a large part of their revenues to them, and even art was bribed into lending itself to the celebration of unmarketable stuff as a seductive form of encouragement to buyers. But what was all this to him ? His candle was guttering. He watched it idly as it flared and smoked. Never mind ; there was nothing near enough to catch fire, and he did not want to see in order to think. The wick grew longer and longer ; then the flame died down, and there was only a smouldering piece of tinder where it had been. Even that disappeared at last ; there was nothing to distract him now. A thief in the candle ! What did that remind him of ? Anything he had seen lately ? Anything within the last hour ? He pressed his hands upon his eyes. Oh, Frank, Frank ! It was too hard to bear. He could retaliate ; why not ? Who could bear this fresh outrage ? Few would have taken in silence, as he had done, that other desperate wrong. And this was worse. There had been a plain motive, then, besides vague hatred, for that murderous attack ; and one crime had led to another. A man's goods, and even his

life, are not always of such importance but that the attempt to deprive him of them may be forgiven by the sufferer. Frank's conduct had never till that moment stirred Arnold's indignation to the depths. Many a time in the last few years he had been a prey to that strange sickness of youth which prefaces a more robust nobility, and pictured death to be no grisly spectre, but a winsome shade with arms soft to lull all they embraced. Yes, Frank would have been kinder to take his life before his love; for impunity—what else could it be?—had encouraged the boy to this last step on the road to infamy. He had cut himself off from forgiveness now; and yet Arnold, though he no longer felt the smallest compunction about exposing him to any pains and penalties whatsoever, had his hands tied by the conviction that, if deserved misfortune were to overtake Frank, an innocent victim—Ursula herself,—would be implicated. Great heaven! what infatuation had prompted her to accept that pledge of base affection which it had been her first act of responsibility before the world to display so carelessly? It was an insoluble riddle. Arnold groaned to think that marriage in her case, too, was doomed after all to be the gloomy sacrificial rite of a savage deity whose delight was in an altar stained with fresh traces of human anguish. But, if Ursula was to sit in dust and ashes all her days

as soon as she had discovered her error, there would be time enough, alas, for this repentance; she should not reproach him for having hastened it. He would go away, get some work to do, and cultivate cynicism during intervals.

“Heigh-ho ! with youth, health, and appetite—and I shall soon regain the two last—there is every reason why I should still hold myself fortunate, no doubt,” and he laughed bitterly.

He got off the bed, and lit a fresh candle. Plans for leaving Burnport and its bitter-sweet associations began to shape themselves. Flight was the only thing : not another idle hour would he pass in the place. He would go home to-morrow, only giving himself time to pay his bills and pack. He would not even say good-bye to the Daltons ; it would be better to explain things in a letter, when he could not be asked awkward questions. Besides, he did not want to run the risk of meeting Frank again ; the sight of that miserable young ruffian might tempt him from his present determination to do nothing—nothing to occasion a moment’s uncasiness to Ursula. Was there no hope that his memory of her would ever be obliterated ? Articulate prayer had always seemed to him an unnatural effort, but he felt that one definite entreaty would henceforth rise spontaneously from his heart to his lips,—that these last few weeks in his life might be clean forgotten out of mind.

He would write to Joanna, too, when he reached home. She might have forwarned him. He had thought her unusually excited that morning. Perhaps she was going to do so when Miss Hilda interrupted them. Ah,—now he remembered—she had already begun to hint at some mysterious news about Ursula.

He took one or two restless turns up and down the room.

The letter lying on the bed where he had dropped it caught his attention. Anything for distraction. He opened it.

“DEAR MR. ROBUR,

“You will shortly discover, if you
“have not done so already, the futility of paying
“your addresses in a certain quarter. She has
“compromised herself, — hastily and thought-
“lessly, it may be,—but none the less fatally for
“that, as far as you are concerned,—and your
“brief dream is over. I will not say that I am
“grieved for your fate. Perhaps you have really
“had an escape. It would have been a great
“mistake in your calculations to have married a
“girl who has just proved her marked preference
“for the biggest blockhead within my somewhat
“extensive experience. I pity her for the heed-
“less folly with which she has jumped at this
“connexion. The whole thing has been kept so
“secret that I knew nothing of it before to-day,

“when she becomes her own mistress. Now,
“however, she seems resolved to avow it openly ;
“and I write off to you at once to forearm you,
“if possible, against the shock. Under the pain-
“ful circumstances you will see the advisability,
“I trust, of not remaining here any longer ; it
“could only lead to further embarrassment. Think
“no more of her ; she has friends, old and new,
“who will do all they can for her. My own
“feelings towards her are unchanged even by
“this blow.

“*One who wishes you had met with your deserts.*

“Forgive me for remaining anonymous. The
“slightest screen is welcome, and I do not want
“this subject reopened if we should ever meet
“again.”

Who was the writer ? Putting all the facts together, as far as he knew them, Arnold arrived at the inevitable conclusion that his construction of Joanna’s behaviour had been only too accurate. He did not recognise the writing, but he was not sufficiently acquainted with her hand to say that she could not have written it. Certainly there was a feminine angularity about it, and the undemonstrative sympathy which it seemed to him to express was quite in keeping with Aunt Joan’s character. Without doubt she was responsible for the words which he had just read.

The worst had come to the worst, and he was

not going to waste sentiment over it. The letter explained everything, and confirmed him in his purpose to beat a retreat from the field next day. He was not particularly surprised by this final piece of evidence; the force of the blow was spent before, and he experienced a sort of pleasure that he would be saved the disagreeable task of writing to Joanna to account for his departure. He set light to the paper with the candle, and tossing the flaming mass into the grate began wearily to undress.

Our logic has an inconvenient trick of deserting us when we need it most. Human intercourse is indispensable enough, but no slight penalty is exacted for its enjoyment in the monstrous cross-purposes, the thousand distorted impressions and false conclusions with which it hems us in.

Returning to East Rise, Miss Blunsden and Ursula found Aunt Joan yawning over some worsted garment apparently designed for the torture of a poor dependant. She had stayed at home out of sheer obstinacy, according to Miss Hilda, and also for the minor reason—a fact of which the elder sister was unaware—that she was nervous lest Lorton might get into the house in her absence, when there was no knowing what mischief might follow. She had gone out very little since his first visit, feeling that he was probably waiting for her vigilance to be

relaxed to seize a fresh advantage. He was sure to come and enquire whether Ursula had received his present, and she was nerving herself for that opportunity to scare him away from the neighbourhood.

Miss Hilda recited the account of Arnold's sudden relapse with appropriate dramatic action. She then proceeded to give an exhilarating sketch of the points in which his] symptoms tallied with those of other cases with which she had been on terms of intimacy, including her own; and finally, relinquishing particulars for generalities, testified in flattering terms to the sovereign excellence of her private elixir as a specific for any form of disease known to body or spirit.

Joanna was startled. She looked at Ursula, and wondered whether anxiety about her had anything to do with her lover's illness.

"Poor fellow, I wish I had been there," she said.

"Oh, you couldn't have done any good, my dear, if you had been," rejoined her sister, not without a suspicion of asperity in her mild voice. "I saw what was the matter with the poor young man at once, and Mrs. Dalton—an extremely sensible woman on most topics—agreed with me perfectly. There were quite enough of us there without your aunt, weren't there, my child?" and she turned to Ursula, or rather to the place

where she had been standing ; for Ursula had disappeared, finding Miss Hilda's high spirits too much for her.

"Well, now, what do you say to that, Joanna dear? A positive breach of manners and decency!"

"Nonsense, Hilda. Do you forget what the poor child has been through to-day? Besides, I daresay she's tired and worried with the excitement of this evening. I thought she looked pale when she came in."

"Pale, h'm," observed Miss Hilda meditatively, sinking into her chair of state with a sigh of relief; "well, well, a little of my——"

"Yes, I'll see she has it," interrupted the other, anxious to avert another digression concerning the beneficent drug.

"My dear, how impatient you are!" Miss Blunsden was getting drowsy, and went on in a droning, sing-song tone that was particularly exasperating to her sister. "There may be more cause for her excitement than you think of. That young Mr. Frank Dalton is very attentive, and she seems to like him."

Joanna laughed scornfully. "And do you approve?" she enquired in a not altogether pleasant manner.

"I do not see what there is so very laughable about it, dearest. It seems to one very natural and proper. And, let me tell you, it would be

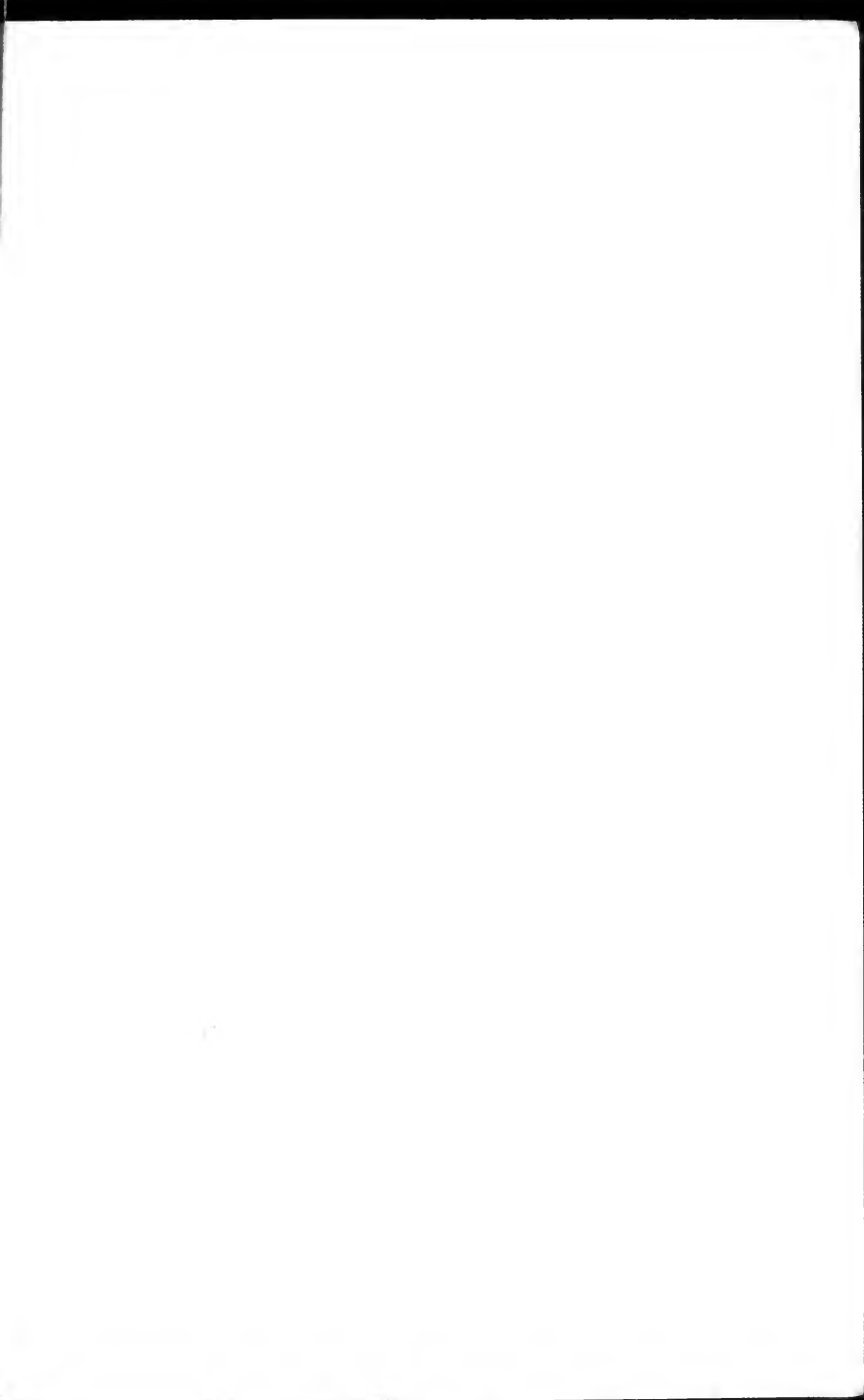
by no means disadvantageous to our darling. Mr. Dalton has plenty of property, and only three children to leave it to ; and his son seems a very nice, quiet, gentlemanly young man. I do hope, Joanna, you will not allow any absurd prejudice to stand in the way of our sweet child's prospects."

"I confess to having a certain amount of jealousy for her sake, if that's what you mean," remarked Aunt Joan severely ; "and, to tell you the truth, Hilda, I'm not so drawn to Frank Dalton as you seem to be ; but perhaps that's because I am so dreadfully unromantic."

This was a home thrust ; but Miss Hilda sustained it with angelic fortitude.

"You must really try to curb your foolish, unchristian pride, my dear," she said, and fell sound asleep.

Joanna looked at her recumbent form for a moment as if she would have liked to shake it. Better counsels triumphed, however. She extinguished the lights, and retired on tip-toe.



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